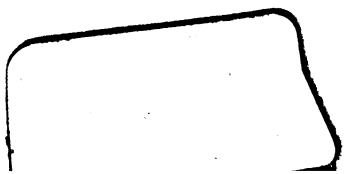

THE COST OF A SECRET.

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THE

COST OF A SECRET.

BY THE

AUTHOR OF "AGNES TREMORNE."

IN THREE VOLUMES.

VOL. III.

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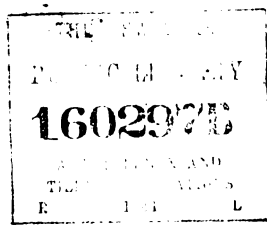

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THE COST OF A SECRET.

BOOK VII.

CHAPTER I.

AFTER Norton's death, Gerard did not attempt to see Cordelia again. As soon as all was over, he telegraphed to Sir Arthur, received his wishes as to the funeral, and fulfilled them. Among Norton's papers was found a letter addressed to Cordelia. Gerard sent it to her without a word from himself.

In that beautiful cemetery out of Porta Pinti, with its cypresses, its box hedges, and its narrow walks dividing the earth enriched by so much beloved dust, its wreaths and its flowers, Norton was buried. Gerard followed him to the grave, and perhaps envied the peace which the poor youth had so early won. A few days afterwards he left Florence for Malta.

During his journey he had time to reflect on the change which his aunt's death had made in Ivy's fate. Till now he had not realised it. How he regretted not having made some stipulation with Miss Clayre previous to leaving England for Italy as regarded Ivy. He wrote to Sir Arthur, and urged him to show great kindness to her as compensation for the disappointment she must feel at this arrangement, as it had been such a natural expectation in both, that after her aunt's death she should have joined him. He wrote to her also, entreating her to tell him precisely what kind of life she led, and told her that if he saw the slightest sign of her being unhappy, or in any way neglected, he would instantly throw up his commission, return to England, and remain there till he was free to receive her himself. In his actions Gerard was as disposed to be impetuous and precipitate as ever; it was only in his manner that he was so measured and self-controlled.

Ivy was far too unselfish to have written in any way to Gerard so as to drive him into such imprudence; besides which she felt quite competent to defend herself from all unkindness up to a certain point; Gerard himself could not prevent unhappiness in living with such uncongenial

It was, perhaps, not the least of her hear the way he was alluded to by Sir

Arthur, and the undisguised venom with which Lady Clayre spoke of him.

It would seem, to hear this lady, that his existence had been a wilful wrong to her child, and she did not restrain herself, even before Ivy, in the expression of her malignant anticipations as to his health and his fortunes; not, of course, as evil wishes, but as the probable effects of his carelessness and recklessness. These insinuations had been much more bitter since Norton's death. Nearly three months passed thus. At the time Ivy left the Court with Annie, Lady Clayre, Sir Arthur, and the two other children were alone. Sir Arthur, however, soon left. He never remained long at the Court.

In a quiet cold-blooded way Sir Arthur was an inveterate gambler, and he was in his element in such places only where he could indulge this vice. His club, little trips to German spas, had absorbed most of his ready money, and dipped the estate to a great extent.

The knowledge that Gerard, not Norton, was now his heir, was an anxious one. Certain spoliations as to felling timber, mortgages, &c. might have been little heeded by Norton, but Gerard was too keen sighted to be deceived on such points. Had Gerard inherited any money in right of his mother, had he made a prudent marriage, it would have been different, but as it

was, how would it be after Sir Arthur's death, when the time of reckoning arrived? These thoughts had much perplexed and agitated Sir Arthur, and had considerably added to his usually taciturn ill temper during the period Ivy had been with them. But, of course, his thoughts never took the shape of regret at his own unprincipled expenditure, but concentrated themselves on his grandson's various imprudences, and more particularly on that worst of all, his marriage. He cursed it with a bitterness which increased as time passed. Cordelia would have died a thousand times over, had the evil wishes of one poor mortal possessed power over another. The lady with whom he had been desirous of connecting his family by Gerard's marriage was still alive, and her thousands were still held in her maiden hand, and never did her name fall under Sir Arthur's observation without an imprecation on the tie which, in his folly, he deemed the only obstacle between Gerard and the possession of this wealthy bride.

Ivy and Annie had left the Court about Easter, and soon afterwards Sir Arthur had received a letter from an old friend of his, the Princess Bifrons, announcing her arrival in London, and he told Lady Clayre, that as they had not met for two years, he would run up to town to see her.

"She was the cleverest girl, and is now the most superior woman I know. I believe if she set her mind to do it, there is nothing she could not achieve. There were ugly stories about her after she left England with her father, twenty years ago, a mere child of sixteen, but she has lived them down by sheer force of character. She is quite a 'power' in certain religious and political circles."

"Is she very rich?" asked Lady Clayre, without any irony in her tone, though the question sounded a satirical one.

"Enormously rich; her father had no other child, and the man she married, died soon after, leaving her a widow at twenty, without children, and at the head of a princely fortune even in Russia."

Sir Arthur set off.

It was always rather a relief to Lady Clayre to be alone. She could then screw and pinch and stint still more, and it was with a sigh of relief that she ordered a meagre one o'clock dinner, no fire but in the children's school-room, where she intended to live and eat during her husband's absence, and told Ellen she need not put on her afternoon dress till her papa returned.

A few weeks passed without any event to mark them.

One morning as she was writing out some

accounts, she told Frank and Ellen to play on the lawn till she came out herself, to take them for a walk. She had so perseveringly limited her establishment that while Ivy was away there was no one but herself to walk out with them. The demure little Ellen, to whom play was a word unknown, put her fingers in her muff and began walking in a very staid old womanish way up and down the lawn in front of the house, taking no notice of her brother. Frankie, with the instincts of his age, was so delighted at this opportunity of a little play without the eternal "Take care of your dress, don't spoil your cap, don't tread out your shoes" that he began rushing about, darting hither and thither, turning head over heels, and utilising his time in various ways. His gambols led him further and further from the house.

At last Lady Clayre finished her letter, and joined her little girl.

"Where is Frankie?"

"He is playing mamma, shall I call him? he is dirtying himself rolling on the grass, I am sure."

"Call him, Ellen."

Ellen called him, but without effect.

They crossed the lawn, but he was not to be seen.

"I am sure he's hiding, mamma, if we don't take care he will pounce out upon us from some bush."

For a few minutes Lady Clayre believed Ellen, but only for a few minutes. She did not think it likely the boy would play such tricks with her. She called, her voice gradually assuming a tone of anger as she did so, but all to no purpose. At last she became alarmed. In spite of her mean narrowness of heart she was after all a mother, and a sickening fear of the little stream which flowed at the foot of the lawn made itself felt. Her legs shook under her as she walked down to it, hearing, without heeding, the voluble remarks and conjectures of her little daughter. The stream was sparkling and dancing along as many a stream dances and sparkles, even when it has swallowed up yet dearer and more valued lives still; but there was no trace to be seen of Frankie.

"Look, mamma, there are some people coming from the Mill Cottage towards us, and look, there's Frankie—is he hurt? they are carrying him."

Lady Clayre sat down, or rather slipped down on the grass, for she could not stand. She guessed at once what it was.

The people came towards them very slowly. Ellen ran to meet them, and told them her mamma was there, "but what is the matter with Frankie, is he hurt?"

"Hush, Miss."

"Why may I not speak, tell me, what is it?"

They shook their heads, and awed by the silence, she held her tongue.

When they reached Lady Clayre, the man who held the child in his arms, said,

"Oh, my lady, he did not suffer, before I could get to him he was gone. Hold her, Bess" he said to his wife, "while I go up to the house."

The woman did so, but when Lady Clayre recovered herself, which she did almost directly, she staggered to her feet and followed the man so rapidly that she reached the house as soon as he did.

"Tell me," she asked, "but first give me the child." Alas, it was not a living child, only a poor little corpse which she took in her arms.

The man laid it across her lap, the face was pale, but the lips had scarcely lost their baby roses. Just under the curls on his temple was a bruise and a small cut, from which some blood had flowed.

She again looked towards the man to speak.

"I hears little master a running and playing, my lady, but I takes no notice, thinking as how some one was with him, when suddenly I hears a fall but no cry. I runs to him, he had been scrambling over the gate and missed his hold, for he falls right on the iron stanchion which do fasten it back. When I took him up it was

over, his poor little temple must have been struck; he must have fallen heavy, in a heap like."

"Send for Sir Arthur" said Lady Clayre, as soon as her white lips could articulate.

It was all over. The child for whom she had pinched and saved, and whose exaltation after the deaths of Norton and Gerard had been her dream and hope, was gone.

Gerard was now the only heir. Did anything now happen to him, the Court went to a distant branch of the family, with whom Sir Arthur did not even keep up an acquaintance.

For one moment, as Lady Clayre sat rocking herself backwards and forwards alone in her room waiting for her husband, she thought she hated these distant relatives, less than Gerard, but this was only the madness of a moment; her good sense told her that her little girls would want a friend, and this friend would be more easily found in Gerard than in those who were numerous in family themselves, and entire strangers to her children. Besides this, Ivy had taken a fancy to Annie, and would, probably, always keep the child with her. Even amid the natural and acute grief, the scheming heart occupied itself with plans and projects.

Sir Arthur arrived. He was shocked, and, when he enquired more minutely into the cir-

cumstances, angry. "Why in Heaven's name did you send them out alone? All this comes of your d——d pinching and screwing. Why not have a nurse for those children? The moment your back is turned this dreadful accident happens. I insist upon it, that you engage a servant, a maid, what you like, to look after Ellen and Annie, and never leave them."

"Ivy," began Lady Clayre timidly.

"Ivy is not a nursery maid—don't say a word about expense. Good God! had my boy had some one with him he would have been alive this moment."

Sir Arthur was furious. Grief with him always took the form of blame and vituperation of something or other, and here there was really a good reason for his deep displeasure.

"Will you write to Ivy?"

"I'll telegraph to her, I can't write; they had best stay where they are. Ivy was getting thin and pale enough here, her brother shan't see her till she looks more like herself."

"Is Mr. Clayre coming back?"

"Yes." I forgot to tell you he has been ordered home for his health. He had scarcely landed when he fell ill—the old complaint. I should have written to him to return, however. After all, since Norton's death, his place is in

England, especially now. I have much to consult him about in the way of business."

Lady Clayre bowed her head in silence. She had never sought her husband's sympathy, and his total indifference to her share of the calamity which had befallen them was not unexpected by her. She said less than ever, but shut herself up in her own thoughts. They were divided between grief for the dead, and anxiety for the living.

By a curious mental process she seemed to look upon Frankie, now that he was dead, as if he really had been, what she had hoped she should have lived to see him, the master of the Court. The contingency became now a certainty, and she deplored his death as a loss to his sisters, precisely as she would have done had he been so.

"About Annie," she asked her husband about a week afterwards, "is she to prolong her visit?"

"Yes, hang it, let her stop with Ivy, she is happier there than here. I must be off to-morrow —will you come?"

"Thank you, I am scarcely fit for London yet."

"I think you should try a change of air somewhere, this place must be very bad for you and Ellen just now."

"Just as you like."

"Then you had better go for six weeks or

three months to Sidmouth. I will make arrangements and send Johnson to take a house for you."

So it was settled. Sir Arthur went to town, Lady Clayre and Ellen went to Sidmouth, and the Court was left untenanted.

CHAPTER II.

IT was true that Gerard was obliged to leave India. Italy had been of little service to him. Agitation and suffering had undone what little benefit the change of climate might have produced; and he arrived at Bombay in a state of such debility, that his fellow-passengers wondered at the military ardour which had made him return to his regiment in such a condition. Their praise and their curiosity were indifferent to him. His zeal was not so much for action in India as escape from Europe.

He was more passionately in love with Cordelia than he had ever been, and he was irrevocably separated from her. He was not one whit more placable towards her than he had been when he arrived in England after his wound; on the contrary, she had inflamed his resentment as much as she had increased his love. She had disobeyed him, she had defied him, and, blackest sin of all, she did not love him; and yet, he could not deceive himself, he loved her as madly as ever. Nothing could destroy that feeling.

Gerard Clayre was as different in character from the first impression conveyed by his appearance, as a frozen stream's polished surface differs from the waters heaving below. The process of education in Englishmen gives them all an external family resemblance. Who does not at once recognise those somewhat stiff-necked painfully clean, well-dressed, and, generally speaking, very distinguished-looking men who haunt palaces, and churches, and galleries abroad, as Englishmen? Eton and Oxford, Harrow and Cambridge, send out shoals made after the same pattern. They become somewhat modified by the professions they afterwards enter, but at first they are strangely alike.

Ill health and mental suffering had latterly much changed Gerard, and confirmed a certain coldness of demeanour, and hardened a certain self-sustained reserve which proved him *au fond*, a true Clayre; but his plebeian mother, as I have said before, had also endowed him with a greater depth and tenacity of feeling than usually belonged to the Clayre race. In Ivy there was a simple sweetness of nature which did not conceal this affectionateness; but with Gerard, great pride and the experiences of his boy-life, both at school and with his aunt, had taught him to conceal it. He was morbidly anxious to be supposed as thoroughly cold and hard as he took pains to

appear. Not even Cordelia was aware of the force of the feeling she had inspired. Ivy only knew him as he really was! His poverty and the blended pride and refinement of his nature, had prevented his acceptance of the facile conquests which offer themselves to men of his age and position; and later, during a brief season in London, he had kept equally aloof from the charms of the young ladies he had met. The polished falsehoods, and smiling hypocrisies around him, he disdained with a disdain which he took no trouble to conceal, and he was singularly unpopular among women generally. He openly avowed that no beauty could attract him, no accomplishments charm him, among these conventionally educated beings who all spoke, and smiled, and sighed alike, and in whom there was neither honesty of feeling nor truth of purpose.

Cordelia had won him by the transparency with which her feelings were read in her face and manner, and the complete contrast she was in everything to the pattern damsels to whom he had been accustomed.

Here was truth; here was reality; here was a being graceful and lovely as a poet's dream, but who was also genuine and sincere! Poor Gerard! love is so proverbially blind that he would have supposed all these qualities even if they had not existed. He was a man, and she was an ex-

quisitely beautiful girl—need one explain why he loved? Still he would have paused. To romantic minds he must seem contemptible even to have hesitated for a moment, but Gerard had been brought up among the prejudices of his class; and he knew well how such an alliance would be considered among his own set. Those fine distinctions are not so present to the mind out of England; but yet, he knew well what Sir Arthur's rage would be, and the sneers and inuendoes of the society to which the name of Clayre belonged. A girl without birth, without fortune, whose parents were mere respectable nobodies! It was certainly becoming conduct in the man who had given himself so many airs among his equals, to choose for his wife some inferior, obscure person, no one had ever heard of. He could see and hear as he reflected on these things, the well-bred malice with which the news would be received. He was young, proud, and sensitive, and was therefore not proof against a trial which can conquer the philosophy of the wisest.

To despise the contempt of the contemptible is very difficult! Few attain a platform lofty enough to allow them to do so. "To let them rave," and not only to make no sign, but to feel no irritation one must have one's heart in the grave or in heaven.

But circumstances which we will hereafter

relate had hurried on his marriage, and then had come the exquisite happiness of those few weeks, and then — the catastrophe! He had been a miserable dupe; a few weeks more and all was over: they had parted, as he supposed, for ever.

How he scorned himself for being so easily deceived—how he hated the woman who had lied to him, as he deemed, when she told him she had never loved before, is easy to imagine! His manhood, his hopes, his armour of pride, had all gone down before a passion which had wrecked him as completely as youth, strength, hope, like his, had been wrecked again and again on the same fatal shores, by syrens as delusive and not more fair.

He had met her again, and the old enchantment had revived with tenfold force. How unutterably base did he deem his weakness, and yet it was irresistible; and for all that had come and gone, he felt he could have stooped to compromise the Past and erect a new Future, with her hand in his, had she so willed it. This time she had dared to be true—she had rejected the bare idea with scorn.

Then darker thoughts would arise, connected with Norton. Had not this woman with her sorceress blandishments bewitched him also, and destroyed him? To both Norton and himself her influence had been deadly. The one had given her his life, the other his life's life. She should

pay the heavy debt she had incurred—yea, to the last farthing! In alternate paroxysms of a miserable tenderness or of a fierce vindictiveness, he would spend hours shut up in his own rooms, regardless of the commonest precautions demanded by his own health and the climate.

The bitter and frenzied longing which is also the sure portion of those who love in vain, amounted in Gerard's case to monomania. He had no resources in his present circumstances to blunt the edge of the torture which he endured. Some men are so versatile that they can feel acute suffering in one portion of their being, and yet are not prevented from seeking and finding solace from other sources, but this was not his case. All he was capable of doing was shutting down the expression of his sorrow, so that no one should be acquainted with it; but that effort exhausted him. He could do no more. His was not a largely gifted nature like Cordelia's; with far less apparent sensibility, he was more calculated to suffer long and deeply, for he had no mobility. As he writhed under this misery, a misery as old as the heavens above, which have looked down for so many centuries on the yearning heart of man, he sometimes longed, with a longing which almost became delirium, to free himself —to break the accursed bonds which enslaved him, and try if thus he could not exorcise the witch-

craft which held him in subjection. He went over and over again the circumstances; but fraught as they were with the ruin of his life's happiness, they were not of the nature to admit of judicial remedies. The law takes no cognizance of falsehood, or treachery, or wrong, which may damn the soul, but leave unscathed the external life.

At other times he had an insane desire to go to her, to insist upon his conjugal authority, that she should give up a profession he abhorred, and take her place at his side. It was a bitter and humbling compromise, and he would grind his teeth with rage when he thought of it; but anything would be better than this separation. I am, of course, describing the inner thoughts and struggles of his mind, that tempestuous sea which ebbs and flows within us, but which is never revealed to others. Outwardly there was no sign, and so entirely distinct or rather antagonistic are the two natures which exist in us all, that at the very time this storm of contending feelings was raging within him, it is certain he would not have swerved, even had the actual opportunity been offered to him, one iota from the line of conduct he had prescribed to himself.

"That fellow Clayre has come back, more proud and unbearable than when he left us."

"He is the sulkiest dog I ever met with."

"Don't be a fool. Can't you see he is dying by inches? A man can't look very cheery in the state he's in."

"Why did he come back, then?"

"Why? That's the question. Perhaps he would tell you if you were to ask him." The speaker's tone was irony itself.

"He *may* be serious or sad, and he *is* certainly in wretched health; but I tell you he is the pluckiest fellow alive. I was with him when he was hurt."

"Yes; and I know that if he had not the determination of all of us put together, he would never get through half his duties. Foster says it's sheer will—iron will—for he has no constitution left—which bears him up."

Such were some of the comments made on him, in which dislike or approval were by turns uttered, but never compassion or even sympathy.

Another symptom of how little, in spite of all, his love for Cordelia had become weakened, was the craving of news of her. When a wall of silence has fallen between us and one still loved, do we not all know the ungovernable anxiety which seizes us at times to have tidings of them. It is all over, we know; in life our eyes will never see them, our hands will never touch them, again, but how madly do we yearn only for one moment to have the veil withdrawn, to know

with certainty where they are? with whom? how employed? It is probable that the knowledge will only pain us; but, nevertheless, our eagerness is not diminished by this fear. Thus it was with Gerard. He literally thirsted, as a man in a raging fever thirsts for a drop of water, to know Cordelia's movements. He would walk up and down his room, or throw himself upon his couch, with his hands pressed to his temples, the temperature outside at fever heat, while this insatiable desire was gnawing at his life-strings and producing a more searching fever within.

One afternoon he was plunged in these bitter thoughts, seated at his table, with his head on his hand, when he felt a hand on his shoulder.

The doors were all open, the servants were dozing in that drowsy torpor in which afternoons are spent in India, and his own thoughts were so absorbed that he had not heard the entrance of the person who thus greeted him.

He looked up. It was Foster, the surgeon of the regiment.

"Were you asleep, Clayre?"

"No—yes—that is—I beg your pardon, I suppose I must have been dozing. Will you have one?" He passed his cigar case across the table, as he saw Foster had taken a seat.

"Thanks." During the operation of lighting his cigar, Foster kept his eyes fixed on Gerard.

He sat exactly opposite to him. Foster was a bilious-looking wiry man, with keen black eyes, and a white moustache and beard. His overhanging eyebrows were as black as his eyes, and were in great contrast to the rest of his appearance.

"I observed you this morning on parade, Clayre; and I tell you what—you must leave us."

"I have no intention of leaving India again."

"Eyes bloodshot and inflamed, face livid, pulse,"—he put out his hand so abruptly that Gerard could not withdraw his own—"pulse—well, I know my duty, if you do not know yours."

Gerard did not vouchsafe an answer, and both men continued smoking in silence for some time, while Foster went on with his examination of Gerard's countenance.

"I pulled you through once, and I shall pull you through again by the same method—sick leave—England. You need not frown, my lad, remember I am old enough to be your father, and you *must* listen to me. Neither the climate nor the effects of your wound are killing you: you have some trouble on your mind." Foster closed his eyes as if he was repeating a lesson to some invisible auditor. "A man of your age who does not gamble can have but one cause of trouble. Like the old caliph, whenever I see a fellow going to the dogs (and who has not that one vice which is a rival to Love), I say, 'Who is

she?' figuratively, I mean, of course." He opened his eyes and darted a keen glance at Gerard. "Don't start, but a woman is somehow always the cause, directly or indirectly; it's always the same. Listen: one learns more in twelve months, in a place like this, of experience of women and women's ways than in ten years in England, and I have been twenty years here. It is perfectly ludicrous and yet horrible to me to see the same things over and over again—different circumstances, but the same results. Your experience, your sorrow, your trial, you think peculiar: nothing of the kind, my dear Sir. Men idealise and spiritualise and deify women, till they forget that the loftiest, as well as the lowest, have instincts which are common to all, and which manifest themselves the same in all. We always think exceptions are made for us. There's my dog, for instance. I think he has a peculiar way of fawning upon me, that many of his gestures are expressive of an intelligence which is all but human—there's not one of his breed that has not the same. This knowledge is notoriously a thing of figures—out of every hundred women one can select a certain number who will commit certain crimes, so many who will have certain tendencies, so many with certain constitutions: we break our hearts about a woman, because she has acted up to her nature. We are fools if we do so."

"Be it so," said Gerard, impatiently.

"Softly. No man who has a life to lead, a work to do, allows himself to be so sacrificed. You think my opinions make me hard; on the contrary, they make me indulgent. What animosities, what revenge, what unhappiness would be saved, if we recognized our limitations, instead of champing at the bit of immutable Necessity. Think of what I tell you, Mr. Clayre. I am totally ignorant of your affairs; but I am certain that if you reflect on what I have said, you will understand all this regret is idle. You are like a child who wrings his hands, because water flows, fire burns, cold freezes; all the despair in the world cannot alter the nature of things, but a little good sense makes use of them. I have spoken this to your intelligence, but I have another method with your will. I bring you these papers from the Colonel's: you are ordered home in the steamer which leaves next Saturday."

He shook hands with him kindly, and was off. His words, the sudden prospect of change, were like a douche of cold water, which at first stuns and then for a time clears the brain and braces the nerves. The very opposition to his opinions which he roused, took off Gerard's thoughts for the moment from himself, and directed them to those dark problems in life and character which have such a vivid charm for the mind. It

was a horrible light by which to view love and life, but it might be the true one. The result, however, of his experience hitherto had been different. There was a spiritual as well as a material side to everything; and the complex and manifold contradictions of human character could not all be ranged under the sweeping generality of "instincts."

If this change of thought only were the result, Foster's visit had done him good. And thus inextricably linked for good and ill are we all.

Gerard was sent home as the bearer of important dispatches which admitted of no delay, and in six weeks from the date of his conversation with Foster he was in London.

He posted a note at Southampton to Sir Arthur; and on arriving at the lodgings he usually occupied when in London, and which were fortunately vacant, he found a note from his grandfather, telling him of Frankie's death, and asking to see him on business (he had underlined the word business) the next morning.

Arthur paused, and then resumed with great fervour, "Gerard, you must see that the honour of our name is untarnished. I hold to that—on my soul I do. I know not whether she be guilty or not, but appearances are against her."

There was a silence.

Gerard's eyes were fixed on the ground. His face did not betray the convulsion of feeling which raged within him. At last he looked up.

"Sir Arthur, your informant has deceived you. This is a base lie. Cordelia (how long had it been since Gerard had even *thought* of her by that name)—Cordelia is .... not .... "

A spasm of invincible emotion made him pause. Sir Arthur looked curiously at him. "May I ask why you doubt me ? "

"You have been misinformed."

"How should I be misinformed ? What motive has any one to deceive me on such a point ? "

"I have enemies—she has enemies."

"Would it be an enemy's work to come to me and tell me? Let this be looked into—save your name."

"I know not, but it is not true."

"Has the Past given you any right to say so ? "

Gerard winced under the attack. Sir Arthur saw it.

"I understand that the circumstances antecedent to your marriage were such as to render this probable. Was not this man supposed, even

by her own father to be attached to your wife before you saw her." Gerard started.

"Who told you that?"

"Sir Arthur shrugged his shoulders. "No matter, I know it—you ought after that, to have been on your guard."

"I am sure you have been deceived."

"Did she love you so much as to prove the falsehood of the accusation? I have been well informed, Gerard—and you have been gulled, duped—Be so no more—get rid of that woman."

"Hush!"

"She must not drag our name through the mud—get a divorce; you will be free once more."

Gerard's face was inscrutable. At last he rose—"Give me time—Give me proofs."

He spoke as if each word was wrenched from him.

"Oh proofs! if proofs are all you want, I shall overwhelm you with them."

"Of what nature?"

"Letters—documents—witnesses—I have been careful I promise you."

Gerard's face was dyed crimson as he looked at Sir Arthur, and listened to his confident tone.

"I owe her a turn, if only for breaking poor Norton's heart."

Gerard started!

"I know that the Signora Corda and Cordelia Clayre are one."

This was a most artful stroke of Sir Arthur's. It gave that spice of malice to his conduct, which alas! gave it the verisimilitude in which it would otherwise have been deficient.

Pure disinterested regard for Gerard's honour was too much a contradiction of all their previous relations to be implicitly believed by Gerard, even with the plausible admixture of regard for the honour of the Clayre name. But he knew that little valued as Norton had been in his life, his death was a disappointment, and might inspire Sir Arthur with vindictiveness proportionate to that disappointment.

"What did that poor fool mean by leaving her that three thousand pounds?"

Sir Arthur looked as if he would have strangled Cordelia, had she been present.

Gerard was silent.

"I will say good morning, now. I have an engagement with a friend, who has been of great use to me in this matter."

Gerard rose and bade him adieu. He looked calm and resolved, but there was a fever at his heart, which almost convulsed him.

Should he never escape from the ban of that ill-starred marriage? Whenever he was brought

into contact with it, there was fresh grief and shame to be suffered.

Yet he was incredulous. In spite of all, Cordelia had left her seal on his soul. No, there was some horrible blunder, but this gross wrong was impossible. She had—she did love that man; that stain could never be wiped out, but there was no more. He was not so besotted as to cling to his marriage; it was a lie, and he would dissolve it; he would obtain his freedom somehow, but not thus.

Yet, what interest could Sir Arthur have in deceiving him. He spoke of proofs—witnesses. Gerard clenched his hands till the blood sprung.

He wondered how Sir Arthur had become acquainted with the fact recorded in that fatal letter of Mr. Ashley's. The only person who knew of it was the Princess Bifrons. As he thought of her, a different order of recollections swept across him.

What a considerate, devoted friend, she had always proved herself, and his conscience told him that to her, he had behaved ill. How intimate he had been with her till Mrs. Vibert and Cordelia had been introduced to him. He had totally neglected her then, and yet, in his hour of need, how faithful had been her friendship. How strange it was that among the numerous women whom he had seen and admired, and who, without a coxcomb's

vanity, he could think, had admired him, he should single out one (of whose love for another, before her marriage, he had had proofs in her father's letter, and from her own words), who had never loved him, and who had left him willingly after a few months' marriage!

This was one side of the question.

On the other was the recollection of a face of which purity and pride were the predominant expressions; of a character which, in the intimate life, brief as it was, of marriage, had never given the slightest indication of anything that was not generous, lofty, and, above all, true. Yet how explain the fatal fact of having married him, Gerard, having loved and still loving Corsand? But it was precisely the discrepancy of this fact with all the rest of her character and actions which had been the enigma which had so tortured him. He had maddened himself with seeking to discover the motives which had influenced her, and in vain. She had wrecked his life, she had given him a stone when he asked for bread—indifference for love; how was it then that he could not associate this dishonour with her? It was but the natural sequence of what went before. Foster's words returned to him. This last infamy was but the culmination of what had gone before; the final and inevitable manifestation of the character, &c.

was folded round her head in the same becoming and original manner.

She was humming to a tame love-bird perched on a stand near her when Sir Arthur entered, and she scarcely broke off to return his greeting.

"I was glad to find you at home," he began, rather eagerly for him.

"I found it cold, and countermanded the carriage. We do not like the cold, do we, Cocotte?" holding out her slender wrist, on which the bird instantly perched, and then fixed his bright but rather suspicious eyes on Sir Arthur.

Evidently the Princess was not in a mood for exciting conversation.

"I have seen my nephew—"

"Ah!" The exclamation evinced a paucity of interest in the communication which was, to say the least of it, very provoking.

"He was, as you may suppose, very much agitated at the communication I made him."

"Yes? Take care, birdie. Has he brought any news? This London of yours is very dull, Sir Arthur."

"I am naturally so absorbed in this unpleasant affair that I do not miss the want of news."

"No, that is natural. May I ask you to move that stand nearer to me. Now Cocotte, go back to your perch; here kiss me, you vixen."

Never had Sir Arthur felt so homi-, or rather birdi-cidally inclined.

"I was anxious to see you; perhaps you are not, however, able to allow me a few minutes. If I am importunate excuse me, but let me remind you that your own kindness encouraged me."

"You are not importunate, but it seems to me that there is nothing more in which I *can* serve you. I was willing, when I found that you were seeking for information on a particular point, to help you, finding I could do so; but I do not wish to be brought forward prominently in an affair of this nature."

"Certainly not."

"Nor would I wish that Mr. Clayre, with whom I am acquainted, should connect me with the pain and the shame which this discovery will inflict upon him."

"You may rely that your name will never pass my lips in connection with it."

"My life has now passed into channels of such a different kind that it would be really injurious to me to have my name mixed up in such an affair."

"You are right."

"Individuals are ephemeral, but a cause is eternal; and it is to the holiest cause of all that I am dedicated;" and the Princess raised her fine eyes in self-dedication.

Sir Arthur was fairly bewildered. He was keen, and certainly sharp enough. He had, or fancied he had, a good deal of insight into womanly caprice, but there was something in this woman which puzzled him. Had he mistaken her after all? He had smiled to himself, thinking he could use her womanly jealousy to serve his own purpose, and now in her whole appearance there was something which placed him far off from her. She was in a region where such petty motives could not reach. Sir Arthur had in truth a great insight into the natures of ordinary women; but there were some on a larger scale, both for good and for evil, than he could grasp or survey. Ivy, Cordelia, for good, this woman for evil, he would never comprehend.

It appeared to him that to speak to a person who was absorbed in devotion to some good work, of the pros and cons of a divorce case was like profanation, and yet surely she was the person who had placed most of the "*pièces justificatives*" in his hands. She saw his bewilderment, and rejoiced. There was as much of the malice of the cat in some of her moods as of the fury of the tiger in others, and she was keenly alive to the humour of the thing.

Besides, it did not suit her purpose to be compromised as regarded this affair with Gerard.

She did not for a moment believe in the facts,

or the links of evidence which she had herself very easily added to the chain of suspicions which Mrs. Watson's letter and Mrs. Beecham's information had aroused in Sir Arthur, but she knew enough of Cordelia to be certain that the bare suspicion, that such accusations had been made against her, would make the breach between her husband and herself final.

When the Princess arrived in London, and sent for Sir Arthur, she had made some enquiries about Gerard. Sir Arthur immediately took the opportunity of venting all his malice against Cordelia. He looked upon Cordelia as a stumbling block in the way of the future prosperity of the Clayre family. But for this marriage Gerard might still be a prize in the matrimonial scale. He could offer an old name, a prospective baronetcy and a nominally noble estate in barter for some thousands of ready money. Which ready money might be forced into certain channels for Sir Arthur's benefit. His necessities were urgent. No more money could be raised by himself, Gerard's help was required to do so, and would that be yielded, unless he were himself in a position of affluence ?

These motives were base enough, but also strong enough to excite Sir Arthur, and produce in him a frame of mind which jumped at the possibility of his nephew's present marriage being dissolved. Added to this was revenge for the

three thousand pounds given by Norton to Cordelia. He was coarse enough to believe at once the very worst. Some men never hesitate. They have a foreknowledge of vice in themselves, and cannot credit anything else in a woman. Imprudence presupposes sin, rashness proves guilt. They are the most pitiless censors of a fault, for with them a fault is magnified at once into a crime. They are profligate, and believe in profligacy.

To Sir Arthur it was a natural consequence, that a separated wife should become an unfaithful one. He could have sworn it would be so, and was glad that there had not been prudence enough in Cordelia to conceal her course of life. The game he believed was in his own hands now. All this the Princess had seen and made use of. She had resolved that the breach between Gerard and Cordelia should never be healed, and cared not what means she used.

She knew Cordelia's lofty temper, and that so accused and so disgraced by the mere fact of such accusations, she would break off at once every tie to Gerard, and the separation would become eternal.

And then, the Princess always paused at this point. It was self love, and not love of Gerard which had prompted her, self will, and not a mastering passion that had guided her, and hatred of Cordelia more than affection for Gerard, which had always impelled her to separate them. To

but you are much occupied of course at this moment, I will not detain you;" and ringing the bell, the Princess bowed Sir Arthur out. She stood for a minute as the door closed upon him. "Have I won?" she said dubiously.

While she thus stood for a moment lost in thought, her servant entered the room softly and placed some letters on the table. The noise made by the door in closing had offended the little birds, and their vociferous voices roused the Princess from her reverie.

She moved to the table and saw the letters. After she had turned over several she came to one which she opened with an expression of vexation on recognising the hand-writing.

"Liesa," she murmured, "I thought she was safe in Paris." As she read the letter through slowly the expression changed to one of pain; she put it down hastily and rang the bell. When the servant came, however, she had changed her mind as to the order, for she dismissed him; then again she called him back.

"When did this letter, these letters, come?"

"By the last post, your Excellency."

She read the letter over again, and then went to her own room, and was not seen downstairs again that day. The next evening, about seven o'clock, a woman in a dark mantle and close bonnet let herself out of the door. Her step was

so quiet, and her motions so swift, that the porter started out of a comfortable doze in his great chair only at the sound of the door as it closed.

"One of the women, I suppose; well, I am glad, if she is presuming enough to go out of the principal entrance, that she does not ask me to open for her ladyship. What forward minxes they are these foreign lady's-maids."

CHAPTER V.

TO every mortal man there comes once, at least, in his pilgrimage, a trial, which stamps him irrevocably victor or vanquished in the game of life.

The choice of Hercules is not strictly typical. It is not always between a loose-zoned, flower-crowned pleasure and an austere virtue that we have to choose, but between two figures who both wear the garb of virtue.

"Am I such a slave," was Gerard's torturing thought, "that I prefer dishonour to a severance of the chain which has been my curse? Mr. Ashley's letter was a fact, I saw it with my own eyes. Did she ever justify herself, or deny it? She HAD loved him. Who can know what pique or caprice made her turn from him to me? What was her conduct at Florence? Has she not defied me in every way? Is it not a duty I owe Ivy to guard her name, my own, from infamy?" All the proud consciousness of his unstained descent, all the gnawing jealousy which in some hearts expresses itself always in a desire to be revenged, took the form of justice and dignity. His

relenting feelings, and the deep sense, that was beneath all, that Cordelia was pure, that even if her heart had been too weak to stifle regrets, her conduct had been unimpeachable, were considered weaknesses, and yet—the still low voice made itself heard.

Man of the world as he was, Gerard had never allowed the facts of his marriage to be known. The curt reply that his wife was with her family had satisfied all enquiries in India and in England. He had been too ill the first time he returned from India to go to his club or to see his friends—now it was different. He would have to reveal the truth. His wife was abroad, had been separated from him almost from the time of the marriage—she was a public singer! best get rid of it all at once. Let the facts and the divorce —or, if he could not get a divorce, the separation —be made public together. He walked up and down the room in a whirl of contending feelings. These are the hours which triumph over the strongest man, and wither the glory of his youth.

Had the evil principle which wore the lofty guise of honour been victorious, Gerard's fate had been at once settled. A hard worldly life, unsweetened by love or happiness, would for the future have been his. He would have lived, as many a Clayre had done before him, hunting and shooting when in the country, at his club

or the House of Commons when in town. Pompous dinner parties and crowded ball-rooms being the shape in which he sought amusement, the cares of his estate and the vicissitudes of his party, engrossing his thoughts as business. He was not a gambler like Sir Arthur; he had naturally a fine disposition, and talents of no ordinary kind; but if the door is once left open to evil by an overt act of revenge or injustice, a torrent of deteriorating and petrifying influences sets in, and the last state of that man is worse than at the first.

While he was debating with himself a messenger brought him a note from Sir Arthur asking to see him immediately. Change of position was in itself a relief, action of any kind a solace, and he obeyed. Sir Arthur noticed how careworn he looked. Paler he could scarcely be. The very sources of his life seemed to have been corroded.

Sir Arthur was at breakfast.

"Come in, my dear fellow—glad I caught you at home. Have you had breakfast? No? You must really take something. Wilson, some coffee for Mr. Clayre."

Gerard sat at the table and drank the coffee. He could not speak before the servants, and he knew that until they were fairly embarked in the breakfast operations they would not be dismissed.

"You can go, Wilson—I will ring."

The valet descended to his own regions. He confided to the old housekeeper in the house that mischief must be brewing, for Sir Arthur was so d——d complimentary to Mr. Gerard.

"I have received a letter this morning that I think it right to show you. Previously to your arrival, and feeling that, as the head of the house, I was authorised to act in your behalf in this business, I resolved to write to Mr. Ashley. I did so two days ago."

Gerard ground his teeth together, but repressed the oath that came to his lips.

"Yes, I wrote, and this is his answer. I need make no comment on it." (He passed it across the table. Gerard's face flushed to the roots of his hair as he read it. He put it down without a word.) "I simply informed him that unpleasant reports about Mrs. Clayre had reached me, and that it behoved me to set on foot inquiries as to their truth, but that if he could give me any precise information which would at once belie them, the matter should drop; if not, and my informants had not been mistaken, the course was simple, and the marriage must be dissolved. You see how intemperate is his answer, and how completely he abandons his daughter."

The hand which leant on the table, and which was holding the cup, grasped it with such force that it shivered to atoms.

"Good God! are you hurt—what is the matter—how did you do it?"

"I was very awkward," said Gerard, with a dreary laugh.

"There, ring, have another cup."

"Thank you, I have finished."

"We will ring at once, then. Here, Wilson clear away the breakfast, and see that I am not disturbed." . . . . .

"Evidently a low-bred man this Mr. Ashley," he continued, turning to Gerard.

"He *is* severe and uncompromising."

"Yes, there is a desperate fling at her professional career. However, our business is not with him. You asked me about proofs, and I said I could overwhelm you. I have letters which I will show you."

Sir Arthur rose and went to his writing table. He drew out a packet of letters, and untying them laid them before Gerard.

The first in date was from Mrs. Watson. It was the letter of warning about Norton which had decided Sir Arthur to send Gerard to Italy.

Its style was not unlike her conversation, but through its contradictions and involvements could be traced a determined fear of the attractions of the singer, who had caught Norton in her toils. She said that all Florence raved of her, and that Norton spoke and dreamed of nothing else.

That the Signora Corda was identical with Miss Ashton was not mentioned, but in a postscript it was added that the resemblance between the singer and a lady who had officiated as governess to her daughters, while they were at the Baths of St. Gervais, was the first thing which had attracted Norton to the Signora Corda. Miss Ashton had also endeavoured to win the affections of the young heir of Clayre Court, and was a person of very forward manners and equivocal position in life. Norton's extreme susceptibility was dwelt on in a prudent tone of maternal care, and she also expressed her regret at leaving him, but mentioned he had been very advantageously placed in the house of a lady, who had promised to look after him, as if he had been her own son. Princess Bifrons had known and recommended her.

The next letter was from Mrs. Beecham herself. It was written very artfully, and mentioned the growing passion of Norton for the singer, and added that in spite of failing health, he was always at her house. If unable to leave home, the lady would call on him. The insinuations as to the life of the singer were malicious and coarse. Just what a vulgar woman would attribute to actions, whose real kindness and purity she was not capable of comprehending.

Yet, when one knows what false interpretations

are given to actions and from what different motives from those which really inspired them they are supposed to originate, even by good and intelligent men, is it marvellous that an evil-minded woman could distort and misrepresent Cordelia's kindness to Norton—Norton's devotion to her?

But still, as yet, there was not the name of Corsand.

The Signora Corda had received money when she arrived in Italy from Paris. That fact was known, and commented on. She was known to many of the agents of the liberal party. She saw no one in Florence but Mr. Clayre, and refused all other introductions. Her only associate was a young singer at one of the minor theatres, a low, uneducated girl, who smoked and drank champagne, and was a person unfit for any one to associate with. All this was from Mrs. Beecham.

The next letter was in a man's hand. The Signora Corda had taken into her service a man-servant, who had been dismissed from the establishment of a great Russian lady, without a character. This youth had been at once taken by the Signora Corda, at the recommendation, the lad said, of a benefactor of his, a M. Corsand, who was also a great friend of the Signora's.

Then, there was a memorandum to say the Signora Corda had left Florence, and gone to

Milan, taking this servant with her, and he had mentioned they were going to meet M. Corsand there.

The fourth letter was from a person at Milan. The Signora Corda had arrived there, and had been met by a French gentleman, of the name of Corsand. Immediately on his arrival, he had gone to her hotel, and after a short stay, they had all gone away. The Signora had been very ill for a few days, and the care and attention she had received from her friend had been very great.

The last letter of the packet, by the postmark, was from Lucerne. It was a letter wittily written, and evidently by a lady, though there were only initials. In it were some jesting allusions in answer to inquiries relative to a couple of the name of Corsand, who were living "maritalement" at Lucerne. The lady was young and beautiful, and apparently much younger than her husband.

"You see nothing can be more complete. This last letter was given to me by the person who received it."

Sir Arthur did not mention the name of the person who had given it him. Had he done so, perhaps some dawn of comprehension of the whole iniquitous plot had broken upon his grandson. As it was, the evidence was damnatory. Gerard con-

tinued so obstinately silent, that Sir Arthur felt nettled.

"Not the most besotted husband could remain blind to all these convincing proofs; why should you be more tender of her than I have been? The bride who left her husband after three months' marriage, nominally to remain with her father, but in reality to follow out her own disgraceful inclinations, who has been roving about the Continent alone, and who was there joined by her lover, has evinced from the very beginning of her ill-starred marriage, what an unprincipled creature she is. Gerard shuddered as he listened. "If you bear this dishonour you are not what I thought you, the men of our race have been wild, extravagant, headstrong; but the women have all been unstained, unstained in lineage as in fame. The crest of Clayre is 'Sans tâche;' let it remain so."

Gerard raised his eyes. "I shall never be found wanting, Sir Arthur, to what is due to my name—

"But what—" broke out Sir Arthur.

Gerard's bloodless face flushed at his tone; he commanded himself however, he felt that unless he persevered in this rigid demeanour he should lose all power over himself, and for what he was bent on, he required nerve, composure, calmness.

"Where, where are they now?" He had such

difficulty in articulating (his muscles being all strained to one point, to keep calm, that speech was as impossible to him as to a man paralysed) that Sir Arthur did not hear him, and went on.

"You will take steps to dissolve this marriage?"

"Afterwards . . . ."

"Good God! why not now, why not to-day? Every moment of delay is as unnecessary as it is shameful. I do not understand this misplaced—shall I call it, generosity?" (there was an ugly sneer on Sir Arthur's face as he spoke).

"If—you can—tell me where . . . ."

"There can be no if's. In heaven's name where are you going?" Gerard had staggered to his feet, and was leaving the room.

"Where are they now?" asked Gerard, with the persistence of a machine.

His meaning at last flashed on Sir Arthur.

"My dear fellow, you must be calm."—(Gerard was standing like a statue)—"Heaven only knows where they are; had left Lucerne you see—you can't . . . ."

"Where are they now?—"

"I will find out; but Gerard you must not. . . ." (He did not continue on that track, there was a look in Gerard's eyes which arrested his cold-blooded soothings) . . . . "There is another thing—about Ivy—she cannot stay where she is—"

"No!—"

"I will send for her and Annie to morrow—you could meet them at Bristol, and bring them on to the Court. Lady Clayre is at the seaside, but I will write to her to return, and she will be there in a day or two. Will you write to say—or shall I?"

"I will—and . . ."

"Oh, we will discuss the rest afterwards. You must employ Varnish and Bruttal as your lawyers."

Gerard did not listen to him.

He went home and wrote to Ivy. He then felt that the walls of a London lodging were too narrow and suffocating for him in his present state. Burning for action, for revenge, yet forced to delay. Till Ivy was removed, he could do nothing.

He walked on, and on, through streets, and squares, and parks, conscious of nothing that he saw, nothing that he heard—but the one thought Cordelia and Corsand. Everywhere those two names seemed written in characters of fire before him, fire which could only be quenched in blood, or whispered in a whisper, evasive and penetrating as an adder's hiss, into his ears. The instincts of the natural man were roused, and there was a ferocious desire for revenge—revenge as wide and sweeping as his dishonour

was bitter and complete. Besides, this feverish desire, there was little intelligible, even to himself, in the agony of his passionate, betrayed, and tortured heart. He went home when it was dusk. He had been wandering about for eight hours. He had a latch key, and he let himself in without the ceremony of knocking. He wished to expedite his journey of the morrow, by putting up his clothes, and setting off by the night train to Bristol. He would wait there. Just as he was slowly dragging up his feet to the drawing-room, the voice of the servant running up after him from the lower part of the house, proved that he had been overheard.

"Please, sir, there's a lady."

"A lady;" how his heart leaped to his throat.

"She is waiting, sir,—shall I bring lights."

"No—no—I will ring."

He opened the door. There, standing in the middle of the room, with her arms held out to him, stood a lady: he could not see her face. He shut the door.

"Gerard—do you not know me?"

"My God—Ivy!"

"Oh! Gerard, forgive me, but I was obliged to come—to you. What is all this? Oh! Gerard, save Cordelia."

And Ivy, dropping at his feet, as if she had been shot, fainted away.

CHAPTER VI.

MOST tenderly did Gerard raise Ivy and carry her to the couch. He loosened her cloak and took off her hat. She was insensible for so long that he became much alarmed, and was just about ringing for assistance when the poor girl's eyes gradually unclosed, and after a shudder of surprise, she sat up and seemed to remember all. She took Gerard's hand, and looked imploringly in his face.

"Where do you come from, Ivy?"

"From the Ferry. Oh, Gerard!" and the usually composed, self-controlled Ivy burst into tears.

"What is the matter, dear, and why have you come?"

"Gerard," said Ivy, in a low, horror-struck voice; "do you know what Sir Arthur has written to Mr. Ashley? Who has deceived him?"

"But you do not answer. Why are you here?"

"Two days ago Mr. Ashley received a letter from . . . ."

"Well; speak out, Ivy." He withdrew his hand from hers and stood away from her.

"He said nothing to me, but . . . ."

"Turned you out of the house, I suppose, as a prelude."

"He fell down insensible; he has had a fit."

"I saw an insolent letter he had sent to Sir Arthur."

"I only gradually heard what it was."

"Did they dare to tell you?"

"They?" asked Ivy with a flash of indignation on her face; but she softened down in a minute.

"After he had written his answer to Sir Arthur he fell down senseless; he was speechless till an hour before I left."

"How did you know?" asked her brother moodily.

"When I learned what Sir Arthur had written, Miss Ashley, Mrs. Ashley told me, I felt I must see you. I could ask you, I could tell you the truth."

"What truth?"

"Gerard, you have no part in this, have you? It is all some horrible blunder of Sir Arthur's."

"I have no part in it but one."

"Her heart might break, but she would never see you again. Would you revenge yourself, for the pain she may have given you, by destroying her——"

"I must revenge the wrong done to my name. What can a girl like you know of such things? Did she ever name that villain?"

"What villain?"

"Corsand." Gerard clenched his hand as if to strike, as he spoke that name.

"Corsand! Oh! Gerard, this is madness!" and again Ivy's slender figure swayed to and fro like a sapling in a storm; and she sunk on the sofa shuddering from head to foot.

"My poor child, this is too much for you. I must insist upon your not speaking again upon it; but what can I do with you?"

"Let me stay here to-night, said Ivy. I am dizzy and tired."

Gerard thought a little. At last there was nothing else feasible, which he could think of, than to keep her where she was. He left the room, and after a little consultation with his landlady, she consented to give up her own room to Miss Clayre, and to sleep in the adjoining one. Some tea was brought Ivy, and when she was a little recovered, he asked her when she would like to set off the next day—"I will take you to the Court."

"I must go back to the Ferry."

"Go back to the Ferry?"

"Annie is there. I must return to her."

"Cannot you understand that that house is the very last where you, my sister, can go?"

"Yes, I understand it might be so if you were not here, but you will prove to Sir Arthur he has been deceived."

Gerard almost stamped with impatience. This pertinacious pleading to him as Cordelia's champion was maddening to him in his present mood.

"Ivy, I can stand a good deal from you, but not such folly as this. Do not make me curse her; if I were to think that my sister is to be alienated from me, is to waver in her sense of right for the sake of an ill-judged girlish infatuation for one totally unworthy, I should be a miserable man indeed. Disobedience and obstinacy were the first evil qualities which she displayed towards her father, and I will not foster them in you. I am sorry for Mr. Ashley, but I am more sorry that you were there at all, that such an intimacy has ever commenced; and worse than all the consequences of my own rashness and impetuosity, and the shame it has brought on me, would be the feeling that your moral sense had been warped by evil association or misplaced regard."

"I love and honour the Ashleys, Gerard, they have been kinder to me than any one in the world."

"Were you not happy at the Court? why did not you write to me?"

"Never mind now, let us only think of this ... Mr. Ashley is ill, dying I fear; for his sake be merciful—you owe much to him I know, wait—do not act in any way against the daughter while the father is on his death bed. If you were to sift these accusations, see the people, go to the places they name, yourself,—save Cordelia, save yourself." Ivy clasped her hands in a passion of entreaty.

Gerard's intentions as to Corsand never entered Ivy's head, nor did she in her innocence understand the bitter burning sense of jealousy, which writhed beneath all Gerard's fierce condemnation.

He covered his face with his hands. How could he express to the gentle heart beside him, that to give pain, anguish, death wounds, to Cordelia was his wish, and that to compass this he cared little whom he should strike. Let him reach her at last, and all would be well.

"You shall return to the Court, Ivy." Gerard was white with rage.

"What would Cordelia think of me if I left her father in such a state?"

"Again!" He felt as if he could have struck her.

"Do you think that a person who was true, noble, good, could suddenly become wicked, false, weak? As to M. Corsand——"

"Do you know him, too?" He let his hand fall on the table with a violence which would have startled any one less firm than Ivy.

"I do; he was aunt Anne's old friend. She knew him in Paris. To M. Corsand and to Cordelia I owe all the happiness I have ever known. If there be a good man on earth it is M. Corsand."

"Good God!" Gerard murmured, "her brain is turned, or she is bent on destroying mine."

"Do you know that it was he who saved your life when you were landed at Southampton? But for his care you would never have reached London alive. I owe him my brother's life; can I be otherwise than grateful?" It was touching to hear the piteous tones of loving entreaty in Ivy's voice.

"Where is he now?"

"In Algiers; I saw him just after aunt Anne's death, and he was so sorry for me, and he helped me as no one else could at that time, when I was so lonely. He then told me he was going for some time to Algiers, but he may have returned."

"When did you hear last from him? Do you write?"

"Yes, but I have not heard for some time. He

said he should not be back for some time from some exploring missionary expedition to the interior till this month, and that then he would write."

"Then he has been absent certainly four months from Europe?"

"Yes. Before that, he was in Paris, for he used to write regularly. I know," added Ivy innocently, "that there is some secret between Cordelia and M. Corsand . . ."

"Secret?"

"Some secret of Mrs. Vibert's, I think. Perhaps that has been misrepresented to Sir Arthur?"

Gerard started up and walked up and down the room in impatient bewilderment.

By this time Ivy had quite recovered herself. She was again her own calm and steady self.

"Will you wait till I write to M. Corsand?"

"Wait?"

"I can get an answer in eight days—a week."

"A week! You must be a fool, or worse."

"A week which may save the misery of a life! Oh, Gerard, think, if you were wrong, what would ever console you?"

"I must bear it as I have borne other things. How could I be worse?"

Ivy threw herself on her knees before him.

"But it will not be yourself; here there are others; if Cordelia loses her father I think it would kill her, for she would know she was the

innocent cause of his death, and through a whole long life you would have to bear this knowledge."

"Or bear dishonour—but how should you understand—"

"I understand that every way there seems dishonour, and wretchedness, and sorrow. Pause, I beseech you; let me write; you can tell Sir Arthur that M. Corsand has not been to Italy."

"They have told you all then"—fiercely asked Gerard, and he muttered an execration on the Ashleys.

"When I heard that it was a letter from Sir Arthur I asked what it was, and Sarah, who at first knew nothing, told me it was on the table, and I could read it; but she and Mrs. Ashley ran in afterwards to prevent me, but I had done so. Mrs. Ashley had told Sarah then, and they both tried to comfort me. I was more wretched than they were at first, but soon I thought of you as my hope and my help; you would, I felt sure, save us, save Cordelia. I came to you, for I knew you were too just, too generous"—and again her sobs almost made her inarticulate." "Oh, Gerard; I will send you proofs, indeed I can do so. You will see that, in spite of all, Cordelia has always loved you. Faults, weaknesses, she may have; who is without? but treachery, disloyalty, dishonour, have never stained her."

"My dearest, you must be quiet. I will say

brief days of happiness, and a host of fond trivial recollections recurred to his mind. He was enraged with himself. Could nothing defeature that love, not even this blot? Then he recollected her, as he saw her last. More mature, more queenly, more beautiful still, when he hated her, yes, hated her, and she had scorned him.

At night, and alone, he could indulge all the caprices of grief; and tears, which were a torture rather than a relief, rose to his eyes. In the day, pride would cover all with its invincible mail, but he could yield now to every phase of the contending feelings which were fighting their hard fight within.

It seemed to Gerard afterwards that there were depths in his being, which he had never fathomed till that moment. A power of revenge, hatred, abhorrence, which were savage in their bitterness and intensity.

The ice had cracked, and the dark waters were laid bare, and monstrous forms were seen floating within, which hitherto the smooth impenetrable surface had concealed.

At last he threw himself dressed as he was on the bed, worn out with emotion and grief; and exhausted nature took its revenge, for in an instant he fell asleep, into a sleep, deep, and dreamless, locked away from all disquiet, from all vengeance—from all remorse.

CHAPTER VII.

THE next morning about six o'clock Ivy dressed herself. She had not closed her eyes. All night she had debated with herself, how she should persist in opposing Gerard and manage to return to the Ferry. She had letters from M. Corsand, which she determined to send to Gerard. Their dates would convince him that M. Corsand was in Algiers while Cordelia had been in Italy. One actual mistake proved, it would be easy to refute the others.

She opened her door, and found the woman of the house had already left hers. She put on her hat and cloak, and went into the drawing room. It was precisely in the condition in which they had left it. The room opening from it was Gerard's. She knocked gently, but there was no answer, and the door was evidently locked. She waited half-an-hour.

She then sat down and wrote to her brother :—

"DEAREST,

"Do not be angry when you find I am gone. My duty is clear. I will send you letters

which will prove to you that in all this there is some horrible error. Your happiness, Cordelia's life, must not be sacrificed to it.

"Forgive me, if I seem disobedient and self-willed now. You will exonerate me afterwards. The train leaves at seven, and I shall lose it if I wait longer. "Your loving Ivy."

She folded and sealed the letter, addressed it, and left it on the table.

She went down stairs, and saw the sleepy maid of all work on her knees scouring the steps and pavement in front of the house, with the door wide open. She quietly walked down and passed on. She knew that at no great distance she must meet with a cab. The maid drew aside to let her pass, but was too sleepy, and too busy to be roused by the fact. Ivy was no coward; but she was glad when she found herself in a cab driving to the Great Western.

Ivy's good sense enabled her to see her duty and act upon it. It was a sacrifice to her upright straightforward character, to leave the house clandestinely as it were—but these are not the least trials in life which call on us to put aside our consistency—for while at the Court she could serve no one, at the Ferry she could serve the Ashleys, Cordelia, and Gerard. The moment Mr. Ashley was out of danger she would return

to the Court with Annie, but to leave them now would have been impossible, on his account, had no other necessity impelled her to go there. But as it was it clenched the conviction that was in her mind—that her place was there, and there only.

As she waited in the carriage for a few seconds, she fancied, and her heart beat at the idea, that among the number of persons struggling to the other carriages, she had recognized an alert active figure, iron grey hair, and that military precision of accoutrement and mien which distinguished M. Corsand; but all now swept on into further carriages, and she lost sight of him.

As she leant back, her thoughts reverted to the journey taken two years ago, which had brought her to the Ferry for the first time. How empty had her head and life been then; how rich with all its actual anxieties it was now. Her romantic hope of reconciling Gerard and Cordelia was over, but with this loss there was also much gain.

After all, it *is* a gain to learn humbly that it is not we who can move the tempers and hearts of others to our own will. Indirectly we can serve them, and sway them, but who ever succeeded in direct interference? We all say that prayer, "Lord, who dost govern the unruly wills," &c., &c., but we are slow to act on it. The more unselfish, the more generous we are, the more are

we disposed to try eagerly that others shall see the good as we do.

As the train stopped for ten minutes at one station, Ivy, who by this time was quite alone in the carriage, saw that some of the gentlemen were walking up and down the platform during the interval. One of these looked up as he passed.

"M. Corsand!" exclaimed Ivy.

"My dear child! I was in search of you."

He jumped into the carriage. "I returned to England two days ago. I have been so anxious about you, for I found no letters in Paris from Cordelia, and none of late date from you. I hurried through London, and went to the Court, and heard what had happened, and that you were at the Ferry, and I hurried back through London —where I had some business—and was going to you to-day.

"I am so thankful, I cannot tell you;" and the revulsion of joy was so great that Ivy's tears flowed fast.

"What is the matter? Cordelia?"

"When did you hear last from Cordelia?

"Not since she left Florence. I gave a letter of introduction to her to a distant relation of mine, Michael Corsand, who is lately married, and he tells me he saw her at Milan."

"And then?" Ivy could scarcely articulate.

"She was very ill there, but was recovering."

"And then?"

"He left Milan for Switzerland. I wrote to her at Milan, but she had left, and I cannot trace where she went from Milan. My cousins admired her excessively, and regretted they were obliged to leave her."

"If Gerard could only hear you." She burst into tears.

"Do be explicit?"

She made an effort, but she could not. She only said there had been some horrible mistake. He must come to the Ferry. Sarah would tell him.

He looked at her with his usual grave kindness. Part, though not all the truth flashed on his mind.

When they arrived, he stepped out with her.

"It was here, Ivy, I first saw you; when your eager, animated face interested me so much. How delighted you were!" She smiled and sighed. He went with her to the little carriage, which had been sent as before to meet her, but this time there was no one but Snip.

Ivy asked M. Corsand to get in with her, and they drove to the Ferry.

"How is your master?" said Ivy.

"If you please, Miss, I believe he is no how better."

"Has Mr. Frampton returned?"

"If you please, Ma'am, he has brought two other Doctorers with him, and they are coming again to-morrow, if you please."

They drove on in silence, and then Ivy got out. She would not drive up to the house, for fear of disturbing the invalid.

Susie opened the door, and clasped her hands with an exclamation of joy at the sight of M. Corsand.

They turned into the dining-room.

In a few minutes Miss Ashley entered. Her whole face was blanched with fear and anxiety. She could scarcely speak when she entered.

Ivy told her she had seen Gerard. "It will all be right now, Sarah; this is M. Corsand."

Sarah Ashley recoiled. That name had always been pronounced with such hatred by her father, that it seemed to be profanation that the man who bore it should be there, under the very roof of Mr. Ashley, while he was perhaps dying.

"Tell him, Sarah," said Ivy, and Ivy was gone before Miss Ashley could stop her.

"Will you tell me," he asked in the gentlest tone, "what is all this? I am alarmed. I have the sincerest affection for Miss Clayre. Your sister has long been to me as a child of my own. You may suppose, after an absence of so many months, how anxious I must be to hear tidings of her. What is this terrible misfortune?"

Miss Ashley looked upon him with wonder. Was this the man who was suspected of having tempted Cordelia to sin—this grave, fatherly looking man! The revulsion had something almost ludicrous in it—she could have laughed as well as cried.

She stammered out something, that Sir Arthur had written to her father about some information he had received about Cordelia; and a few leading questions, and his own quick comprehension told him the rest.

Sarah Ashley saw how pale he turned as it all flashed upon him.

"Good God! what a tissue of lies; cunningly, artfully put together, but lies." He took her hand, and continued—

"And you have heard nothing of Mrs. Clayre herself?"

"Nothing; and that is my misery, for it was *me*—it was my fault that she ever left this house."

M. Corsand looked at her with unfeigned pity. From Cordelia's early descriptions of her home, he understood them all, and was aware of the antagonism which once existed between Sarah and Cordelia.

"You must not exaggerate your own share of all this evil. Cordelia was quite as much to blame, as to that part of it, as you. No one should take resolutions like hers, on the spur of wounded

feeling; it is casting too great a responsibility on others."

Sarah did not quite understand him; but she saw he meant kindness, and was drawn, like every other human being was, to that benevolent yet grave face.

"Something must be done. One word of mine will clear all this. Do not say a word to Ivy; but Mr. Clayre shall be set right to-night, or rather to-morrow morning. I have it in my power to undeceive him, and it shall be done at once." Had Miss Ashley looked up, she would have seen how deadly pale was his face, as he said this.

"In forty-eight hours at latest you shall hear from me." He left her without another word.

A few minutes afterwards, Mr. Frampton, and two other physicians he had brought with him, entered, and were taken up stairs. Mr. Frampton, as he passed, said to Sarah, "I have something to tell you afterwards."

When the physicians came down again, Ivy and Miss Ashley were both waiting in the dining room.

Their report was rather more satisfactory. The very fact that he was not worse, was in Mr. Ashley's favour.

"Now," said Mr. Frampton to Sarah, "I think I can give you tidings of your sister."

"Of Cordelia?"

"She is in London."

"Thank God!" said Ivy.

"You remember my promising Susie to see her mother at —— hospital. I went a few days after I was in London. I was shown into a ward very well arranged indeed, and spoke to the poor old woman. She seemed comfortable enough, and will I think probably remain much as she is for the next two or three years."

"But Cordelia—"

"I cast my eyes about (we medical men must be observant), when I saw, sitting up in a bed near where I was, a young woman—"

"No! no!"

"No, not Mrs. Clayre—be patient I beg. I never saw a face so painted—yes, absolutely painted by consumption. In health she must have been a very plain girl, but this extraordinary pink on her cheeks made her almost pretty: the nose was pinched and waxen white, but the cheeks up to the eyes had this colour on them; a sign which never deceives of galloping consumption. A lady was sitting near her talking to her most earnestly in French. I recognised this lady as Mrs. Clayre, she had evidently totally forgotten me. I bowed. She dropped her veil and turned round."

"Are you sure?"

"I could not be mistaken, I saw her distinctly."

"Did you not speak?"

"I paused a little, I was so surprised; but was going to do so, when she was off like a shot."

"You asked about her?"

"I did. I was told it was a lady who came every day to see a poor young foreigner, a German or a Russian, who was dying of consumption.

"The young woman had been brought in as an 'accident' first; she had been knocked down by a cart. The injury had seemed trifling at first, but had brought on or accelerated a tendency to consumption—she was dying fast."

"Did you ask her address?"

"Yes, it is here. I called a week afterwards on her, but she admitted no one. I heard that she had taken the girl home with her."

Mr. Frampton gave the address. Mrs. Clayre, 6, Western Villas, Maida Hill.

"How long is it since you met her?"

"About a fortnight. That poor girl must be dead now. If your father asks after her, telegraph for her."

Mr. Frampton's zeal had been quickened by a hope that now Cordelia was found, there might be a termination to his anxious waiting for a wife.

"I knew there would be hope the moment I saw M. Corsand," thought Ivy.

That night, the first time since his seizure, Mr.

Ashley seemed to recognise his wife. His eyes followed her restlessly about the room. Once when she was hanging over him, he whispered, "Tell Ellinor she must send back Cordelia, I want to see her." He then closed his eyes and seemed to continue in sleep the waking dream, for once or twice he called out, "Come back, my child, come back, Cordelia!"

On Thursday afternoon they telegraphed for Cordelia.

CHAPTER VIII.

WHEN Gerard awoke, it was a minute or two before all the events of the preceding day recurred to him. But when it all flashed upon his mind, he lost not a moment. He would accompany Ivy as far as Wroxton, give her time to fetch the letters, and to bring Annie away with her, deposit them both at the Court, and then follow Corsand to the end of the world, if needs were; but he would reach him at last.

He dressed hastily, and rang for breakfast.

When he went into the drawing-room, it was all prepared.

He was too much pre-occupied to notice that only one cup and saucer were on the table. He ran up to tell Ivy to come down.

Her door was open and the room empty!

"Where is Miss Clayre?"

"The lady, Sir?"

"Yes."

"She went out before seven o'clock this morning. She left a note for you, Sir." The servant ran down before him and searching about in the

drawing-room, found it. "Here it is, Sir." He took it; the girl left the room.

His indignation at Ivy's obstinacy and self-will was great, but greater was his rage against Cordelia and her fatal attractions. She had alienated his sister's affection from him, and confused her principles. But he had a right over Ivy and would control her for her good.

He would have set off instantly, but a note from Sir Arthur was put into his hand at the moment he sent for a cab.

Sir Arthur had had an attack of gout, brought on, so he said, by the excitement of this unfortunate affair. He was confined to his bed. Meanwhile, he had settled matters so that in the course of the next week, Messrs. Varnish and Bruttall might commence their work. On the following Monday, they would be put into possession of *all* the facts.

Next Monday!

He also enclosed two letters which bore upon the subject, and requested Gerard to read them and return them. Having thus proved his interest in Gerard's affairs, he proceeded to request a signature of Gerard's as to the raising of a sum of money to meet the probable expenses of the action. He knew that Gerard had no funds, and he himself was unfortunately hard-pinched at the moment; but the estate would pay it at

some future time. There was a little truth and much falsehood in this. The money raised was to be applied partly to the first expenses of the law, but the lion's share was to be Sir Arthur's, to pay a debt which had pressed heavily on him for some time. Gerard was obliged to transact all this business before he could leave town.

It was late in the afternoon of Tuesday before, with all his impatience, he could follow Ivy.

When he arrived at Beechford, which is about half-way to Wroxton, he found to his inexpressible disgust, that a collision, which had taken place between the up and down trains, had done such damage that the line could not be fully repaired before the morning. In spite of himself, he must be detained there all night. When he had assured himself that the accident had happened several hours after the passage of the train which bore Ivy (at first he had been alarmed on her account), he could give himself up to all the annoyance and impotent anger he felt at the delay. He mechanically listened to the details of how many were killed, and how many wounded; but without any consciousness of sympathy or attention.

He was intensely irritated at all these delays. It was late, and yet he walked up and down the platform in vague expectancy of something. He

could not have explained why, but he feared that if he left the spot, he should be distanced in the race he was running, and that the object of his vengeance might escape. To secure Ivy, and those letters which would tell him *where* Maurice Corsand was, to be spared life and strength till he could reach him, and he asked no more.

He would rest that night in the railroad hotel, opposite; so that not a moment of time could be lost, although the inexorable time-table told him that he could not leave before nine o'clock the next morning.

It was eight o'clock before he left the platform. When he arrived at the hotel, he found that a great many of the sufferers from the accident had been removed there.

The surgeons were flying about—few in proportion to the number who required their services.

He asked for a room, and after some difficulty was shown into one.

The waiter, who seemed hurried and scared out of his wits, told him that one of the gentlemen who had been hurt was in the next room.

"This, Sir, is the dressing room belonging to the larger room; but we are so driven for accomodation this evening, we can give you nothing else. I am sorry it is so small."

"Never mind, it will do. I am off to-morrow."

"I was to mention, Sir, that perhaps you would be very quiet."

Gerard nodded, and the man left the room.

The room was small; and, what was worse, the partition between it and the adjoining one so slight, that everything could be heard distinctly. There was a small glass door at one end, between the rooms, and a curtain before it. Gerard could hear the surgeon's recommendation, of perfect stillness to his patient, whom he had bled some time before; and the patient urging him, in a low tone, to permit him to do something which the surgeon seemed to think required too much exertion. He was, however, successful; for Gerard heard the surgeon say after a few minutes, "It shall be sent at once, Sir; and if your servant is at home when the telegram reaches him, he will be here at midnight. Now I must ask you to remain quiet. We must avoid fever."

He left the room, and went on to his other patients. Gerard remained in his room. He did not attempt to undress. The emotions he had gone through, and now this sudden and enforced pause, had produced at last a total insensibility save on one point, and on that was concentrated all the energy which remained to him, but it was the energy of a madman.

At midnight he heard steps approaching and then entering, the next room.

A candle was lighted, and a man said in French, that he had come to receive Monsieur's orders, and had brought the packet with him. Then there was a sudden pause, and an exclamation of fear, "Mon Dieu! they have killed him;" and the man rang a bell furiously; rushed to the door and called for aid, running distractedly about the passages, shouting out alternately in French and English, and at last returning to the bedside.

Then—having suddenly become aware, by the light in Gerard's room, that there was some one at hand—he knocked, and opened the partition door between them.

"Pray come in, Sir; my master has been murdered."

Gerard entered.

On the bed, in a state of apparent insensibility, lay a wounded man. His face was turned to the wall, and there was blood on the bed and ground.

By this time the surgeon, who had fortunately remained all night in the hotel, accompanied by several waiters, ran in.

"What is this precious French fool screeching about, and waking every one up for?" he said, angrily; but when he approached the bed, he changed his tone, and looked somewhat alarmed.

"The bandage has slipt," he said, turning to Gerard. "I was obliged to bleed him, for though

not much hurt apparently—some contusions only about the head—there was some fear of concussion of the brain. He must have been bleeding some time. It was fortunate the servant did arrive after all, or it would have been serious."

He begged Gerard to hold the candle, and began bandaging on the arm.

"It will not be much; a few days longer, on account of the increased weakness, that is all."

When he had re-bandaged the arm, he tried to move the sufferer so as to give him air, and applied restoratives.

"Take care, I beg, Sir, said he, as the candle which Gerard held, fell from his hands, and he himself turned so white that the surgeon for a moment thought he should have two patients on his hands.

The man who was lying there, ghastly with loss of blood, and insensible from weakness, was—— Maurice Corsand.

Gerard might well start back. His enemy was delivered into his hands at last.

"Pray leave the room, Sir. Many persons turn sick at the sight of blood, and you seem an invalid yourself, Sir."

"When will he come to his senses?" asked Gerard, as his eyes devoured with a greedy hate the pale face before him.

"Shortly, shortly; but I do entreat you, Sir,

do not remain here." And the officious little man almost pushed Gerard into his own room, and shutting the door between the rooms, locked it.

Gerard clenched his hands tightly as he stood and leaned against the closed door.

"At last, at last," he muttered.

He had recognized Corsand at once, in spite of change and time, and the revulsion of feeling, in having in his grasp the man he was so bent on reaching, was almost too much. He literally trembled from head to foot.

He listened intently to all the movements in the next room: he wanted the persons there to go away, that he might rush in and confront the foe he hated.

He was impious enough to thank God, aloud, that his enemy had not perished in this accident which had been fatal to so many. He considered that he had been spared to glut his own revenge.

The search was ended, he would wait where he was till the crowning hour arrived. Their two paths had met at last.

Sometimes he moved about restlessly in the room with the persistent and monotonous movement of a caged wild beast; sometimes he paused for a moment at the glass door, and saw the surgeon and the servant still busy about the bed; then the surgeon retired, but the man was left to watch and prevent the recurrence of the accident.

The hours passed and still Gerard paced the room.

Once the servant left the bedside and came to the door.

"My master is asleep, Sir; it is of the greatest importance he should not be disturbed. May I beg you to be quiet."

Gerard stared at him, and shut the door in his face.

"*Cet homme est fou!*" muttered the man, as he returned to his post. He did not know that his simple presence in that room had saved his master's life. Once or twice Gerard had had an insane notion of rushing in and grappling with the wounded man, in a hand to hand struggle, but the mechanical restraint imposed by another presence hindered him. He wanted no witness of that conflict.

It is terrible to reflect how near we often may be to crime. There are fierce tragedies seething within us, when, but for some trifling external obstacle, we would plunge our souls in guilt; when the control of education is scattered to the winds, and our passions are let loose to sweep all before them into ruin. Held back by a single hair over a gulf of darkness and dread, the pause enables us to find our footing again. To quench in blood the thirst of vengeance which had so long parched him; to seize his enemy by the throat,

and rid himself of him at once and for ever, was the first fiery and maddened impulse of Gerard's heart; but the common-place accident of the servant's being there, had a certain sobering influence, and this gave time for the invincible conventionalities of habit to resume their sway. Gerard knew there is but one method which grants to civilised man the privilege of murder.

The next day at noon, when the surgeon came out of M. Corsand's room, he found Gerard on the threshold of his.

"How is he?"

"His sleep has refreshed him."

"When will he rise?"

"In two days more if all goes well. To-day is Wednesday, Saturday I should say, or Monday, but the least excitement would be very perilous now. I entreat you therefore, if you are his friend, do not see him before Saturday."

"On Saturday then . . . thank God."

The surgeon looked at him with astonishment, the accent was so strange, the face so pale, but Gerard had retreated immediately. A cruel joy tingled through all his veins; the time would be brief now.

He sate down and wrote to one of his club friends, requesting him to come down to him immediately. He hinted to him for what purpose he wanted his assistance, and said that he

would not open it now; he would not be touched by her pleadings, and needed no information as to Corsand. There was a querulous letter from Sir Arthur, and a packet which he said had been sent for Gerard, and which he had lost no time in forwarding, as "immediate" was on the cover.

He opened it. It was a faded, worn-looking little book with a clasp and a key; the key hung to the book. He unlocked it. On the first page was written,

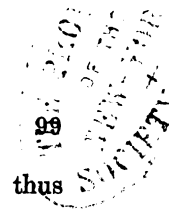
"Cordelia Ashley, Naples."

He put it down as if it had stung him, and covered his face with his hands. Who had sent it? It was Ivy. Had she not said, "I will send you proofs; indeed I can do so, you will see that, in spite of all, Cordelia has always loved you. Faults, weaknesses, she may have; they are common to all; but treachery, disloyalty, dishonour, have never stained her. She is pure, true, faithful——"

The more he called himself a weak fool, the more an aching curiosity impelled him to open it.

"Nothing can alter my resolution," he said, but he drew the book to him.

As he did so, he heard a knock at the door. He sprang to it to see who it was, and to prevent all intrusion; as he opened it, M. Corsand, pale, weak, but as usual calm and self-possessed, stepped in.



The contrast between the men as they thus stood was very striking.

Gerard's tall, stooping figure gave the idea of great physical delicacy. His face was flushed, and there was a wan, wasted look about it which marred its beauty. His clothes were put on in a loose, slouching manner, and the masses of his thick fair hair waved in neglected and lustreless disorder round his face. There were evident signs of mental as well as physical suffering in his appearance, and the ravages of some overwhelming passion could be read with fatal distinctness over his whole person.

M. Corsand was very pale, almost bloodless-looking, but his bearing was as upright and firm as ever. A disciplined and self-controlled nature was in every line of the erect figure, in the almost formally correct arrangement of the dress. The face, with its grave, steadfast dark eyes and iron-grey beard and moustache, had a Vandyke beauty about it which was picturesque and impressive. He looked serious to sadness, but a mere child might have read, that though there was a long experience of sorrow and suffering in those far-seeing calm eyes, the man was greater than his sorrow and his suffering, and had overcome it.

"I have only this moment heard you were here," said the cold, grave voice of M. Corsand; 'and there is no one I am more anxious to see."

Gerard looked at him from head to foot with flashing eyes and a livid face.

"I am equally, if not more desirous, of meeting you, but not here nor thus."

"Not that tone, if you please, Mr. Clayre; I am here to serve you."

"Serve me! Thanks. There is but one thing I require at your hands, and that you dare not, if you would, refuse."

"Dare not?"

"No; matchless as is your insolence in venturing thus into my presence—yes, into the presence of the man you have dishonoured——"

"Cease, sir," said M. Corsand, raising his hand imperatively; "I will bear no insults. You are the victim of one of the wildest delusions that ever made wreck of a man's reason."

Gerard's laugh was frightful.

"You deny, do you?"

"I deny everything that couples dishonour with my name, falsehood with that of——"

"Name her not, or I shall not command myself. As it is, I do not know why I do not strike you where you stand. You are very base, to come here to outrage me with your presence."

The passion with which Gerard spoke roused the passions of the man he addressed.

"*Mr.* Clayre," said M. Corsand, entering

further into the room, and approaching the table, on which he leaned while he spoke, for even his indomitable spirit could not command nerves shaken by loss of blood, and tried far, far more than Gerard yet knew by this subject; "I will not listen to the word, outrage, from you. You do not know what you are speaking of, or whom you are speaking to."

"I am speaking to the man who has dishonoured my life."

"Saved it, you mean."

"I am accusing him of crimes he dare not deny."

"Pause."

"I saw in her father's own writing that she loved you, and that you loved her."

"I loved her? You are raving." M. Corsand turned white, as if he had been stabbed. "My poor Cordelia!" It would be impossible to convey the affection, the parental pity of his tone.

"There was a witness you little thought of at the time. She told me all."

"She!" M. Corsand started up, and looked wildly at Gerard.

"Yes; what Mrs. Vibert would not or could not see, Princess Bifrons was aware of from the beginning. Had she not left Naples I should have been saved."

"Saved!" M. Corsand looked at Gerard with an astonishment which would have convinced anyone that he heard all this for the first time.

"I saw her at your feet, beseeching you to take her from me—me, her husband. What care I whether I *can* prove or I *cannot prove* that she was with you at Lucerne. Can I doubt my own eyes—my own ears? . . . . Good God! You are a madman to have come here, when I think of all this." Gerard raised his hand as if to strike him. M. Corsand drew himself up with a dignity which arrested at once Gerard's impetuosity.

"Do not disgrace yourself."

"You have irrevocably darkened my whole life. Where I once knew love and hope, there is nothing but an intolerable sense of loss. Your life shall pay for the ruin of mine."

"Loss! Do you speak of loss to me? Man, there is no loss while there is life. Speak of loss only when there is death." These words seemed torn from his strong heart involuntarily, for he checked himself, and said, "Listen to me, Mr. Clayre."

"I will not hear you," said the infuriated Gerard; "nothing can alter the damning facts. No lies, no subterfuges can avail against these. I know now why I hated you from the first. Such presentiments never deceive."

M. Corsand folded his arms in quiet disdain. "Do you know how you lower yourself by such language, addressed to a defenceless man? Do not tempt me to regret I am physically incapacitated from treating you as you deserve. I came here to serve you. I tell you I can do so."

"I will not hear you. I expect a friend to-morrow, who will arrange with any friend you name, the place and hour of the only meeting that can take place between us."

"Fool!" murmured M. Corsand, between his teeth.

"You are not a coward, I know; but any explanation you may attempt to give I shall regard as an excuse to evade the only reparation you can offer me."

M. Corsand was standing by the table, and his eye fell on the little book on it. He started, and an air of great relief replaced the indignant expression on his face. "Be it so; I reserve to myself the right of deferring my statement till that time. No one will then regret the present violence of your words more than you will do, for there are facts which no stubbornness can refuse to acknowledge. The day after to-morrow, at this hour, if nothing should occur to prevent it"—he laid a great stress on those words—"I expect your friend. Till then——"

"Do not dream of escaping me."

"Till then," continued M. Corsand, with a stern and haughty disregard of the interruption, "I will continue to serve you in spite of yourself."

Such was the impressiveness of his manner, such the marvellous influence this man possessed over all he came near, that Gerard, in the topmost height of his rage, was overruled; and instead of giving utterance to the fury which was in his heart, he was silent. M. Corsand bowed, and slowly walked to the door, and the two enemies parted with an external courtesy of manner which was worthy of the old chivalric days when knightly foes exchanged stately salutes before rushing into mortal combat. When the door closed upon Corsand, Gerard sat down, and seized the book on the table with the clutch of a miser handling again the gold which he has been forced to lay down for a while.

He could not have explained, had any one asked him, why he opened it so eagerly, or how, seeing his name on a page towards the end of the volume, he was at once riveted, and read on.

Shall we look over his shoulder as he reads?

BOOK VIII.

CORDELIA'S DIARY.

* * * *

We have just returned from a party at the Austrian Ambassador's. For the first part of the evening there were private theatricals, and then dancing.

The private theatricals were much as such things usually are. Weak imitation, and awkward assumption of dramatic power, except in one instance. Princess Bifrons acted charmingly. Ease, spirit, grace were in every gesture, every tone. The part of her stage lover was acted by a Mr. Clayre, whom she afterwards introduced to us. He has only just come to Naples. He looked distinguished and graceful, but his acting was inferior to hers. After the acting was over, he joined our party, and remained with us the rest of the evening.

I am not sure whether I shall like him. He is

proud and reserved, and yet, when he does unclose his lips, he speaks like a man who has thought and felt. He put my cloak on carelessly enough as we left, but I heard him ask Mrs. Vibert to be allowed to call upon her. She consented, and when I stepped into the carriage after her, and looked back, he was still standing under the portico, and our eyes met.

* * * * *

Mr. Clayre comes every evening. He says this is the only English-looking room and society in Naples. This evening Mr. Clayre and Princess Bifrons came in. Mrs. Vibert was not in the room. M. Corsand was reading some letters to her on the terrace. The Princess said she would wait for her, and sat down opposite to me. Her manners to me are usually half caressant, half insolent, and she watches me with a pertinacity which is most oppressive. She affects to consider me a mere child, and tries to patronise me in a way which rouses all my pride, and which I resist with a disdain which evidently provokes her. As she still claims to be young—and she must be twelve or fifteen years older than I am—she is forced to look upon me at twenty as scarcely emerged from childhood. This is sometimes amusing, but often most irritating.

To-night Mr. Clayre and she went on with a

conversation they had been engaged in before they entered; it was about love.

She spoke eloquently and passionately, but in a way which grated on me. I could never speak thus. I have enough of my namesake's spirit in me, to recoil at these warm expressions. When I love, my life and actions shall speak it, not my words. Like Shakspeare's Cordelia, "I cannot heave my heart into my mouth."

How Mr. Clayre listened to her! They then spoke of first and second love, and as he answered she turned livid, and her eyes blazed as they turned upon me. I had only answered in monosyllables when I was directly addressed, otherwise I had been silent.

Hitherto he had agreed with her, and looked at me coldly and reproachfully. I was nettled, and, perhaps, spoke more harshly than I felt; but now the expression of his face changed.

"I could admire—I could even feel a passion for a woman who had loved more than once; but I could only love where the heart had been untouched before. I shall be my wife's first love. I will have no defaced inscriptions on her heart; no name shall be engraved on that amulet but my own."

"You are a rash man," said the Princess; "it requires great penetration to decipher a girl's heart. How can you know what fleeting fancies,

what imaginary loves have passed over its apparently pure surface?"

"But I should claim confession."

"And you would believe in a confession thus elicited?"

"Yes."

The Princess smiled scornfully. "And if you afterwards found yourself deceived?"

"If I were so unfortunate, there would be a remedy."

"What?"

"Instant separation. I would never forgive deception on such a subject."

The Princess's whole face changed like magic. It is not usually an expressive countenance; she is too short-sighted for that. Outward objects rarely bring a light to her eyes or a smile to her lips, but sometimes a strong emotion can be read on her face more distinctly than in other faces for the expression of it, with her, is not checked by the restraint involuntarily imposed on us by the looks of others. I have often noticed this peculiarity in short-sighted persons, and I have had an uncharitable pleasure in noticing it in the Princess. Like the rattle of the rattlesnake, it is a warning. She is so strong and so artful, that if her eyes did not thus betray her, we could not escape her. She is aware of it, I think; for her eyelids are generally half closed, in a dreamy,

languid manner; but now and then, when conversing on some subject which excites her, she forgets this caution, and then one reads her feelings as distinctly as a child's. She was very angry—why, I do not know—with the beginning of Mr. Clayre's speech. Some persons have hinted that he might induce her to enter the marriage state again, but she is so much older than he is, and there is such a contrast and opposition in their tempers, that I do not think it possible. However it might be, at the end of his conversation, her expression instantaneously changed, and a sudden flash of triumph passed over it.

M. Corsand had come up to us while we were talking, and had listened to it, for he addressed Mr. Clayre, and said:

"I think you forget that one law of human nature is progress, and that the change which proceeds from mere development would make a person love at six-and-twenty a very different person from one he or she loved at sixteen."

"Do you mean," said the Princess, "that a girl who married at sixteen would, if she loved another man than her husband at twenty-six, be excusable for her infidelity, owing to the law of development?"

"No," said M. Corsand, in his calm manner, as if he had not perceived the irony with which

she spoke; "no; a girl who married at sixteen must fulfil the duties she has imposed on herself, and must tread the road to which she has limited herself as well as she can; but we did not speak of marriage. I think the fleeting fancy of a girl of sixteen ought not to be considered love, nor ought she to be taught to consider it irrevocable. The deliberate and mature choice of the judgment, the crowning impulse of the emotions, and the delicate instincts of the heart, when all are centred in one, form what we are all content to call love; but these are never ripe together and at once at so early an age. I should distrust a woman of twenty-six, who told me that she had never had the slightest fancy for another."

"Distrust her truth?"

"No; distrust the liking which she then had for me." He turned away, and I saw the Princess look very markedly at Mr. Clayre, who went on addressing her. Mr. Clayre never by any chance speaks to M. Corsand himself.

"It may be a weakness, but I have no pretensions to be a philosopher. I *never* would marry a woman who had loved before, and if I were deceived into doing so, I would never forgive her?" He fixed his eyes upon me as he spoke.

Again the Princess looked at me with a mysterious and sphynx-like expression on her face. Shortly after she took her leave, and was soon

followed by Mr. Clayre. I agree with M. Corsand. Every girl sometimes sees a faint dream in the heaven of her fancy, which is the harbinger of the new day, but is not *the* day. I should be miserable indeed if the persons who pleased me two years ago were to be bound to me now; I have thought and seen so much these two last years.

Neither Mr. Clayre nor the Princess knows Mrs. Vibert's secret; they would have spoken differently if they had. Hers is second love, and yet how complete it is, how vivid, how real! How he and she understand each other! I love and honour them both so much, and I can see how they fulfil each other. No one was ever more noble, more generous, than Mrs. Vibert, and her impetuosity is so guided and so restrained by *him*. Not even here will I write his name. And he—good is the word which in its fullest, largest acceptation belongs to him. I remember when they confided their secret to me, after my earnest and sincere congratulations to them, I went into my own room, and I knelt down to thank God that there were two such happy persons in the world.

I do not comprehend why Mrs. Vibert should wish to keep it a secret, but she has confided this secret to me, and *nothing* shall extort it from me.

* * * *

I have chosen the life which is most adapted

to me. Study—retirement—till I have attained proficiency; and then a professional life, with its discipline, its noble ambitions, its glorious triumphs! With the exception of Mrs. Vibert and M. Corsand, no one knows my aim, though I think the Princess suspects it, and sometimes I fancy Mr. Clayre also, but the other persons I see have no notion of it. I have written to ask my father's consent, and I anxiously wait his answer.

Mr. Clayre talks a good deal of *home* being the only sphere for a woman. He is very young, only four years older, I think, than I am, and Mrs. Vibert says we are both alike in our determined positive dispositions, and in our uncompromising opinions. We never agree, and yet we are always arguing. He touched me one day by saying, "I believe I yearn for a home, and an undivided love in the woman who shares that home, more than most men, for I have never known it. I lost my mother as a child, and since hers and my father's death I have lived at school. My holidays have been spent with my aunt or my grandfather, Sir Arthur Clayre, but I was there only on sufferance,—a rough, idle schoolboy, to be scouted and avoided by the whole household. They tried to prevent little Ivy being fond of me, but that they could not manage. A home, therefore, is a vision yet to be fulfilled for me."

He talks of his sister with delight. She is very young, but must be a charming girl. Not pretty, but so frank, so joyous, and though so young, so earnest. He says she is very much snubbed by her aunt, and kept in leading strings like a baby, as far as any independence of action goes, but yet she has contrived to give them all an opinion of her force of character, and of her steadiness of purpose, which alarms them. He made me laugh by describing the sort of dislike, almost repugnance, which their grandfather, Sir Arthur, has for her. Ivy (what a pretty name) is quite unconscious of it, and it would be amusing, though rather sad, to see her in such an uncongenial home, and surrounded by persons so totally different from her. Ivy and he are to live together as soon as he can make a home for her. He says this is a holiday, but when he gets home he will put his shoulder to the wheel in good earnest, and that Ivy shall be with him in two or three years at farthest. For a man so reserved, it is strange how he opens his heart to us—to Mrs. Vibert and to me. He never introduces these subjects when the Princess is here. Mrs. Vibert was intimate with this quiet, inanimate, but gentle aunt of his, when both were young in Paris. His cousin, a youth much younger than himself, is the heir to the baronetcy, but his health is delicate, and his intellect feeble, and it is

more than likely that he will never live to succeed his grandfather. In default of him, this Gerard Clayre is the heir. He speaks of his cousin with the greatest affection and pity, and never for a moment thinks of the possibility of this succession. He frankly acknowledges that he is very poor, and that he must work his way in the world. At present he has a moderate allowance from Sir Arthur.

When we were first acquainted with Mr. Clayre, I had a presentiment I should dislike him. A man without a profession, an idler, a mere society man, is my aversion. Who is absolved from the rule of work? But there are contrasts of character in him which interest me in spite of myself. In some things I feel I could guide him; in others I know he would sustain me. No two persons could be more different than he and M. Corsand. M. Corsand is so wise, so right, so raised above human passions and weaknesses, that one is never anxious about him, and Mr. Clayre is so faulty and so wrong, one is always so much in doubt whether to agree with him or to contradict him, that in spite of oneself one is continually occupied about him. It is very strange though how the two dislike each other. Mr. Clayre's amateurship, his dallying with the realities of life, is so opposed to M. Corsand's thorough earnestness. And M. Corsand's uncompromising and positive

views are not appreciated by Mr. Clayre. A Frenchman always reduces everything, religion, politics, morals, to a rigid, organised system. We are as firm in principles, but more yielding in form. Our rules are broad enough to admit exceptions; with them, all that does not fit into prescribed limits must be broken, or it will in its turn break.

Still I think neither does justice to the other. I am quite sure Mr. Clayre has noble qualities, but he is younger than his age. M. Corsand is considerably older than his, and, of course, their views, opinions, and sentiments, are as wide apart as the poles. I do not think that had he had heart happiness, and all the aspirations which that word inspires, that Mr. Clayre would have been deficient in energy or persistence, but hitherto he has been as lonely and uncared for, as to all heart and spirit needs, as the veriest pauper. His little sister, about seven or eight years younger than himself, is the only human being he tells me who has a real love for him, and she looks up to him and relies on him, not he on her. It has been an isolated childhood, and youth, and hence the difference. Were I not vowed and dedicated to art, I might—I might—but I will not be disloyal to my apprenticeship, even by a thought. Enough, that I have known a person, who, though he upsets many of my theories and contradicts re-

morselessly my opinions, has interested me more than I wish to be interested in any one. He comes to us every evening, and if there are only Mrs. Vibert and M. Corsand present, we dispute for hours. If the Princess joins us, however, I efface myself, as the French say. I have a fear of that woman I cannot explain. I confided this feeling to M. Corsand once. He was silent at first, and then he said :—

"I can understand it; and what's more, she dislikes you still more than you dislike her. That woman hates in you, your possession of certain qualities to which she attaches enormous importance—(beauty, youth, artistic cultivation,) and which she knows are not hers. Beware of her, Cordelia. She hates you in proportion as she thinks you are loved by one whom she wishes to retain under her influence." I blushed. I think she is to be feared. Her history is a mysterious one.

She is the daughter of a Russian general, who was ambassador to the English Court for years. She returned to her own country, was very much admired at St. Petersburg, and then there was a sudden collapse, and she disappeared from the gay world entirely. After two years, she reappeared as Princess Bifrons. She had married a man twenty years older than herself, but of great wealth, and high in the confidence of the Emperor. Though her conduct always seemed irre-

proachable, strange rumours became public of some mystery connected with her, though of what nature, was not very distinctly ascertained. Prince Bifrons died, and she inherited his vast possessions, to the indignation of some relatives of his, who had always considered themselves his heirs. She lived quietly for some time on her estates, and then travelled. The rumours were then much exaggerated, and before she arrived in Naples, there was a story which ran round our circle to this effect,—that the Princess, as a girl, had married a private in her father's regiment (he was a military man, as well as a diplomat), that she had a child, that her father had discovered the marriage, the man had been knouted and sent to Siberia, and she had been forced to marry the Prince. The child had disappeared. With many exaggerations and additions, this story was repeated and repeated, till it created a feeling of disgust, which would have manifested itself to her on her arrival in utter exclusion from society, had it not been for Mrs. Vibert. Mrs. Vibert was too generous to believe rumours, which were too contradictory in detail, to be based on proof, or to condemn anyone unheard. Her influence, whenever she likes to exert it, is always so great, that she overruled those who had made themselves so busy with the name of the Princess, and if the report still circulated among the few, it did not

lead to any hostile demonstration. The Princess was received by some, and soon her manners, which can be most fascinating, the powers of her conversation, and her brilliant hospitality, made her the popular, universally sought for person, she now is. I do not know whether she ever was aware that she owed this debt of gratitude to my dearest friend, but certainly with her she is different from what she is with any one else. She is humble, caressing, I might almost say, deprecating.

Latterly Mrs. Vibert has been complaining of weakness, and has lived almost in her own private rooms, so that she has not seen her so much, but I sometimes fancy that she doubts her and suspects her as much as we do. I often see her eyes fixed on her and Mr. Clayre with anxiety. Does she also recognise that in that woman there is a power of persevering enmity, of ferocious hate, which, if roused, would be implacable, and that in some way I have excited in her an antagonistic feeling, which may pass at any moment from passive aversion to overt malignity?

How great is the contrast between those two. I looked at them this evening, as they stood together on the balcony overlooking the bay. Mrs. Vibert was leaning back against the column, and I caught her profile with the moonlight on it. So noble, so pure, so sensitive a face, I have

never seen. In her person, in her whole bearing, there is such an indescribable beauty. There is an expression not only of exquisite refinement, but of lofty, large-souled goodness in her face. One can read in her eyes that she loves and is beloved! Her companion was seated on an ottoman, at her feet, and I could see her full face. She is always languid and calm, but now and then there are brief spasmodic jerks of voice and gesture, which bespeak fear and unrest. In spite of her magnificent dress, of an air of command which imposes on most people, there is always, to me, about her, the look of one whose instincts are, or have been, at war with society. Something degraded, and yet fierce; abject, yet tyrannical. She was speaking very earnestly, and Mrs. Vibert listened, but I could see that she did not listen with sympathy. When she had finished, Mrs. Vibert spoke in warning or reproof, I do not know which; but I believe that I was the subject of their conversation, for Mrs. Vibert left the balcony, and came to me and put her arm round me and kissed my forehead. The Princess stood for a moment and reclasped her bracelet, and when she joined us she was perfectly calm and self-possessed. I should have thought nothing more of this scene, but that on coming down as usual for my early morning walk, and passing through the dining room, I saw something glitter

him again. "He has insulted me in every possible way," she said, "and I will keep his letter always as a proof of how much he values my friendship."

My father's letter to me is cruel in the extreme. He told me he had forbidden my mother to write to me.

I think I should bear it better if I knew what he had written to Mrs. Vibert. It is something dreadful to judge by her indignation. In the most unwarrantable manner he seems to suspect M. Corsand of being the cause of what he calls my "shameless perversity." In my letter the inuendoes about him are bad enough, but they must be worse than bad in Mrs. Vibert's. She would not shew it to me, but she sent for M. Corsand. He lives in the palazzo next our garden, and they were talking over it for hours.

On some subjects, the theatre, and foreigners, my father is prejudiced to a degree that seems to me wonderful. I should tremble to meet him I think now, and to return to the Ferry would be impossible. It is wicked to feel as I do I know, but I cannot help resenting sharply and strongly unprovoked wrong.

One day when I was weeping at the bare idea of returning to England, Mrs. Vibert looking very pale and resolute, said, "You shall not return, *Cordelia*. Depend upon it, you shall never run

the risk of suffering what you would be sure to suffer *there*." I did not know what she meant.

The next day she and Mr. Clayre took a long drive together.

* * * *

Is it possible that my whole life has passed unconsciously into a new direction. I have made my choice, no more Art but Love; Gerard Clayre loves me, I am to be his wife.

M. Corsand has just left me; he looked serious when he asked me if what he had heard was true.

"You have consented to marry Mr. Clayre?"

"Yes."

"It is too late for me to do anything but wish you every happiness. God grant you may be happy, dear child."

"You wish me happiness; but you look as if you scarcely believed your prayer would be granted."

"Cordelia, do not say so; there are folds in every human being's heart and character which no one, not even the nearest and dearest, can ever penetrate, and I am not wiser than others. I ought not, therefore, to have felt so certain as I have done hitherto, that you were as yet incapable of loving, and that you would have found Art, for the next few years, sufficient to absorb your emotions and your energies. It seemed to me that you would have to learn how much and how

little Art gives, before your whole being was completed and attuned to love."

"I confess that a few months, nay, a few weeks ago, I had not desired this. An artist-life devoted to study was then my ideal of happiness in this world."

"And now?"

I felt I blushed.

He looked at me kindly but keenly. "Mr. Clayre has qualities which I can well believe could win you, my only fear is that you are both too young, and both, pardon me, somewhat too undisciplined, to assume the serious responsibility of marriage. One has no experience to guide the other, and the other has not the self-control to make up for the want of experience. Let an old friend give you one counsel. Be patient, Cordelia; life is long, and its secrets will not bear being torn open. They must be gradually unfolded. Happiness is not plucked as a flower in full bloom, save by the hand which has sown the seed and patiently nurtured its growth. You are too eager, too impulsive——"

"Should I have been more happy had I been able to lead the life of an artist?"

He looked at me steadfastly. "Honestly, I think so, at least for the next two or three years. Outward circumstances have so much power over you, you can be so easily swayed by the feelings

which others excite in you. Those you love, those you hate, can draw you or repel you with too much facility for happiness."

"You think me weak——"

"No, not weak, but so sensitive, so susceptible; your imagination is so vivid and so easily excited, that I tremble when I think how much there is in the fate you have chosen, which may grieve you or wound you——"

"Gerard!"

"No, God forbid, I think highly of him; but I know a little of his family, they are so proud, so heartless. I beseech you, Cordelia, steel yourself against them, and do not let them ever come between you and your husband. Let *no* one do that."

* * * *

My father has written kindly and has given his consent. He says that I am so full of whims and freaks, he is glad that a younger hand has taken the guidance of me.

This morning Mrs. Vibert called me to her.

"Cordelia, I have been speaking to Mr. Clayre, Sir Arthur has not written, but why should your marriage be delayed on that account? Mr. Clayre is of age, he has an allowance from his grandfather, and I wish that the marriage should take place at once."

"Impossible!"

"No, Cordelia, not impossible, if I wish it. Cordelia, my dear child, shall I tell you why I earnestly desire that you should marry at once?"

"Tell me."

"For years I have had a warning that my life was a precarious one. I inherit a mortal malady, and it has never missed one of our family at this age. A day or two ago I detected its earliest symptoms. I have no time to lose. I may live a few months longer, I may die to-morrow. It would be a comfort to me if you were married, if your own home and no other received you at my death. Be silent, as you love me, the least agitation hastens the end."

That day Gerard and I had our first quarrel. In the afternoon when he came, he told me that Mrs. Vibert had urged an immediate marriage. I burst into tears.

He looked fixedly at me.

"But you seem averse to it. I confess I was taken by surprise myself."

I started, and my tears were dried as by magic.

"Averse!"

"I was taken by surprise, for till now, Mrs. Vibert has seemed to think our engagement could not be too long. She would not hear of less than a year's probation, and now she says she should like it next week."

"I told her it was impossible."

"Do you know the alternative? She said, that if we were not married immediately, as she would permit no engagement, it must be broken off."

"And you?" I said coldly, for his manner had grated on me.

He turned quite pale. "Good heavens, Cordelia, what is the matter? your voice, your eyes, your whole manner is changed; tell me, I beseech you, the truth; do you love me no longer? You weep at the bare idea of our marriage taking place earlier than we expected, and you ask *me* what *I* answered when the alternative was proposed of breaking it off."

He spoke so energetically that I was a little softened. "I was a fool to tell you I hesitated for a moment; women like hypocrites; I ought to have declared I jumped at the idea. But you, who know my position, how dependent I am at this moment on Sir Arthur, ought to understand, that, for the moment, the fear by this haste of making him more angry than he is sure to be, arrested my eagerness . . . . otherwise . . . ."

"We were both unreasonable, for you were vexed at my tears."

"And you?"

"Never mind, it is past."

"Cordelia, I know I am a jealous fool, but tell me, with those truthful eyes, that you love me, that you have never loved but me."

"You may believe it," I said. "But you?"

"I swear it."

"I do not ask to be loved first," I said, "but loved wholly."

"You are my best, my dearest. Then you will agree to what Mrs. Vibert asks?"

That recalled to me the reason she had given me for hastening it, and again I was overcome.

At last, with tears, with anguish, which must have surprised Gerard, I consented to the immediate marriage. How could I tell him!

* * * *

I have been married a week; never was a sadder bride; at times Gerard seems perplexed at this sadness, and resents it; at others, he seems satisfied and trustful. He should be so; God knows I love him with all my heart.

There are two subjects, however, I avoid touching on. I do not wish to betray a secret confided to my honour, and I therefore avoid speaking of M. Corsand. I also hesitate in naming the Princess. I feel sure that she loved him, and he admires her in a way which irritates me. Men are so slow in fathoming a woman like that. I *wish* he could see her with my eyes.

Sir Arthur has written; Gerard would not show me the letter, but his face told me that the worst fears of M. Corsand were realised. I seem to feel a heavy cloud of impending gloom drawing over me.

My father has written to Gerard; that letter I saw; it was an angry but not really an unkind one. He said he had heard from Sir Arthur, and that the terms of the communication had not surprised him, knowing the character Sir Arthur bore. That he had consented to the marriage on receiving Mrs. Vibert's letter, but that had this letter reached him first, he should never have permitted it. Sir Arthur has entirely disowned his grandson, and has insinuated to my father that so hasty a marriage must have some hidden and disgraceful motive.

* * * *

I have been married three months. Mrs. Vibert is dead. I am at the Ferry. These sentences comprise the sorrow of my whole life, the defeat of all my hopes. It avails little to recur to the past when it is irrevocable, yet I find myself going over and over again the incidents of these last few months, as if I could find a clue by which I might discover that I had made a miscalculation, that the sum total was not this, always the same, my lifelong misery.

I was recalled from my brief honeymoon by

M. Corsand. Mrs. Vibert was dangerously ill. I returned. In three days this best and kindest friend was taken from us. Her presentiments were too true. Gerard was much affected, and was all tenderness and consideration towards me. Let me write it down, that I may have it ever present to me. No man could have then shown more love, no woman could have dreamed of possessing such a heart, as I then madly thought was mine. We were poor, we were uncertain, and anxious about our future prospects, but we loved in full trust and wholeness of heart; I did, and I deemed he did.

* * * *

It was a week after Mrs. Vibert's death, she had been buried the previous day, that I sat alone in my room, while Gerard had gone to Villa Santi about some matters of business and to look over her papers. As I was considered her adopted child, Gerard as my husband had taken the place of a relative, and arranged the affairs which had to be looked to. Strangely enough it seemed to others, not to me, my name was not mentioned in her will. To the astonishment of every one, the whole of her fortune was bequeathed in trust to M. Corsand for charitable purposes. Since her death no one had seen M. Corsand. He had gone to Sicily!

While I was thinking of the past, and of my

dear friend, Princess Bifrons, who had arrived the day before from Russia, was announced.

She looked pale and ill, as if she had suffered and was suffering; her voice was low and she scarcely raised her eyes as she spoke. She told me how much she lamented Mrs. Vibert, in a way which touched me.

"What will you do without her?"

I could only sob. She soothed me kindly. "But how is it that you were not with her to the last? Why did you marry that man?"

"That man!"

"Mr. Clayre. Why was your marriage so hastened? Why were you allowed to marry him? What fatal haste!"

"What do you mean?"

She rose and walked up and down the room. I implored her to tell me what she meant; I could not understand her.

She turned round abruptly. "Are you happy—is he good to you?"

I dried my eyes and rose too.

"I am afraid there is some error, Princess—will you excuse me;" and I was going to leave the room. I could not submit to such questioning. She ran after me, and drew me close to her. She looked into my face as if she would have explored every secret of my heart.

"He does not love you—poor child, I pity you

from my heart;" and then she murmured "I will not betray him," and left me.

I was violently agitated. It was the Princess who had introduced Gerard to us. She knew him well. She had been most intimate with him. Her name had been coupled with his. I was in a fever of doubt and suspicion.

The time passed; and on looking at my watch, I found it was time for Gerard's return. I longed to see him, and to tell him what the Princess had said. I doubted her, and yet there was an accent in her voice, different from any I had ever heard before.

Presently the servant looked in, and went out again. I walked to the window, and watched for Gerard. It seemed to me that the very sight of his face would dispel the nightmare which was weighing me down. After an interval, the servant returned.

"What is the matter, Porter?"

"I thought my master was here."

"No! he has not returned."

"Has he gone out again then, Ma'am?"

"He has not returned from Villa Santi."

"He returned, Ma'am, while her Excellency was with you, and he must have gone again."

"Returned?"

"I know he returned, for I saw him speaking to Wilhelm the chasseur."

He left the room, and I wondered in silence. Time passed; and at last the servant asked if I would wait for his master.

I said I would, and I waited at the window till the grey eve had melted into the brilliant night; till the night had faded into the soft dawn; till the soft dawn had flushed into day; but Gerard did not come back. Twice I had sent to the Villa Santi, and twice the same answer was brought me. Mr. Clayre had left at six o'clock, and had not been there since.

The eyes of my servants were fixed on my pale face, and there was something of irony and yet pity in their looks. I thought of writing to M. Corsand, to summon him to me, to ask him if he knew where Gerard was; but a feeling of shame prevented me, on the one hand; on the other, I knew that he was suffering so much, that it would be cruel to disturb him about an entirely selfish anxiety.

I was young—I was naturally impatient. I had lately lost my dearest friend; is it to be wondered that I was easily subdued by this unexpected fear? I explored every nook of Gerard's room, and saw that he had taken away some clothes, and some papers. Why had he not taken leave of me, if he had been obliged to go? I could not rest; the coincidence of his departure with the visit of the Princess, her strange words, excited the most wretched suspicions. Gerard

had been in the house, had made preparations for departure, and had never approached me even to acquaint me with the fact. I did not undress, but remained by the window of the sitting-room watching vaguely. By that strange duality which exists in all of us, I knew that my happiness had received a death blow; while, had anyone questioned me, I should have insisted that there was some mistake, but nothing irrevocable.

The morning passed. As I thus sat, Princess Bifrons was announced. I made a desperate effort, and received her calmly. But I knew my face was white as death.

She made some trifling remarks, which I answered quietly.

"You should not let your grief for Mrs. Vibert prey on your health. You look very ill. Will you not take a drive?"

"No; I am quite well, but I would rather remain quiet."

"I must ask Mr. Clayre to persuade you."

"Mr. Clayre is not at home." I did not look at her as I answered.

"Not at home!" She echoed the words.

"He left last evening."

"Last evening!"

I grew impatient at this echo.

"Did you not know it?"

"He certainly came to see me last evening;

but I thought, I hoped—dear Mrs. Clayre, there is some unfortunate misapprehension I fear." She seemed violently agitated, and finally burst into tears.

I felt like marble. "Will you explain yourself?"

She wept on unrestrainedly. "I thought I had over-ruled his resolve. I advised him so to return."

"To return?"

"He will do so—forgive him. We are all three victims, and we must bear our fate as we may—"

I rose and drew her hands from her face. "Tell me what you mean?" and as she turned her head away, I spoke these words, which burnt me as I uttered them. "Did Gerard ever love *you?*" I compelled her to answer.

"Yes."

"No!" I said violently, "it is a lie!"

"Do you defy me? I will prove it to you."

I asked nothing more, but sat down. What need was there of more?

She said, "We are all three miserable, but truth is the best for all of us. I would have married Mr. Clayre—we were not betrothed—for there were affairs which required my presence in Russia; but we should have been so on my return. I went away, little thinking what his pique at my absence would lead him to do. I returned yesterday. I wrote to him immediately

to come to me. When he came I heard all. I flew to see you. I felt I must do so. I went home and again found him there. I will spare you the scene. He said he would leave Naples immediately. He could not confront you. He must go somewhere and learn to discipline his heart. Will you promise me, that if I tell you all, you will never betray me to him. I ask it as one woman appeals to the womanhood of another ; but in this dreadful tangle of fate, in which we are involved, there must be absolute frankness between us two."

I was touched. I promised. I swore that nothing should ever make me reveal what she told me.

"I have brought you his last letter to me before we parted, and you will see how he has betrayed us both. I shall never see him again; but I beseech you pity him, and if you can, forgive him. He is irrevocably yours, and in your hands lies his future destiny."

She pleaded for him with a passionate tenderness which hardened me at once.

"Never, to any human being, reveal what I have told you. He told me that your marriage had been hurried on to comply with Mrs. Vibert's wishes ; had it not been for that—"

"Say no more—I see it all." I remembered that he confessed he had hesitated when Mrs.

Vibert had proposed our immediate marriage, though he then attributed his hesitation to another motive.

"I leave Naples this evening. Yours is the noble part to forgive, to bear with him, to console him, and to teach him to forget me."

I was suffocated with contending emotions, and could not answer her. She left me with a letter in my hand. It ran thus. It was Gerard's writing and signature.

"I have only just parted from you; yet, I must write to you. With you, I have no words to tell you how I love you, but when absent, I long to speak to you of that which is my life now. You are mine and I am yours. I ring the changes on every expression which can interpret happiness, love, truth, and I return to the one fact, that we belong to each other. You told me you feared you had a rival; that she had youth, genius, beauty—three gifts that were not yours. You have one gift which transcends all hers, as heaven will always transcend earth; you love. She will never learn to do so. Do not fear her. Know me and trust yourself. My only love, believe that I love you entirely, and that while you love me, you could as soon lose your own soul as my love. If you love me not, if ever we were parted . . . but why dream of such sorrow? I only know that there are depths of hatred and revenge in

my heart, which, if aroused by a great misery or a cruel wrong, would shipwreck me. May you and I never learn to what love, violently ruptured and torn asunder, can sink. If we were no longer lovers, we should be mortal enemies. I can see your smile as you read, and the thought of that smile brings back a thousand recollections which banish everything but themselves. I will write no more to-night. "G. C."

My first feeling on reading this letter was utter incredulity. No; Gerard Clayre had never written that letter. But that feeling died out as a flash of lightning in the sky, and all was dark again. His own handwriting—his own signature!

I closed it.

I sat for a few minutes. I had only one clear idea—to fly—but whither? The closeness of the house was unbearable. I put on my hat and veil and rushed out.

On the height near our house, is a Pergola, and through the branches is a view of the whole bay, smiling and dimpling on the one side, while on the other, the stern shadow of Vesuvius falls purple black on the water. This was a type of my life—such it had been—such it was. While I sat there, looking stupidly out but seeing nothing, I felt my shoulder touched, and saw M. Corsand.

"My poor Cordelia," he said, in his sad but *always* calm voice, "you must not grieve so."

"Grieve," I replied, mechanically.

He put his hand on mine, and then I saw that my hands and veil were wet with the tears which I had been shedding unconsciously.

"You are right to mourn one who loved you so, but remember that you have a nearer and dearer tie now, and you must think of Mr. Clayre."

I jumped up. "Are you going to leave Naples?"

"To-morrow."

I started up. "Take me with you—I am miserable; take me, I beseech you," and I fell at his feet.

"What do you mean?" He tried to raise me.

"I will never see him again. I beseech you take me with you."

"What is the matter, Cordelia?" and he looked perfectly appalled.

"I know not."

I laid both my hands on his. "I am quite sane. For *her* sake, I beseech you, have mercy on me. I cannot see Gerard Clayre again. If you only knew——"

"I know nothing that can possibly explain your conduct, Cordelia. This seems the very ecstasy of madness. He is your husband."

"No!"

"You must explain yourself—I insist upon it. Who has deceived you?"

"No one; I deceived myself when I married him."

"You must not speak so; he is your husband. You have taken duties, responsibilities upon yourself, which you *must* fulfil."

"When my whole being swerves from them? Never!"

"What do you wish to do?"

"I do not care where I go. I only wish never to see him again. Take me with you."

"You are not yourself when you speak thus. No conduct of his can absolve you."

"Love is the only bond of marriage; where that exists not there is no marriage."

"You know you are belying yourself by such wild words. I must imagine that some serious difference has arisen between you and your husband; but love, Cordelia, does not give itself conditionally. I will not even ask the cause of this, or who is to blame. All between husband and wife is sacred, and not even a parent should intermeddle between you. But, harsh as it may seem to you to hear me say so, remember you have no home but his. You are not free to choose your own destiny now; you have linked it to another, and must abide the act. The discipline of life will come to you through your marriage, and you must accept it. This is your temptation; subdue it. Remember how quickly

you flame into indignation, and how vividly you resent wrongs, which a slower temper would examine, until their whole aspect would change from wrong to error. Are you sure that you are wronged? Is there no other mode of considering what has so overwhelmed you? Even if so, can you not forgive? Must the conduct or actions of another sway you so deplorably that you can no longer tread your own path? Is it not weak to be so easily affected? No guilt of another ought to confuse your own notions of right and wrong. You know what a wife's duties are. You have felt what a wife's love is. Cannot you be able to guide yourself by these? I speak as *she* would have spoken."

I had been growing cold and calm as he spoke. I honour and reverence him with all my heart, but he is too lofty a philosopher for me; yet the tone in his voice as he said *she* touched me. Here was I, agitating and grieving him, when his own heart was bleeding. Oh, that I had died for her. She, so happy, so beloved; and I—and then I thought I was young, and I must bear this sting all my life. Years of unloved life seemed to open before me. I threw my head lower and lower, till I was prostrate.

"Will you consider what I have been saying?" He tried to raise me.

I could not speak, but he read some change in

my face, for he pressed my hand. As he did so, I heard some steps behind us, passing through the vines to the house.

"If I can serve you, *her* child, and now mine, I need not say I will do so. I cannot interfere between Mr. Clayre and yourself; but if there is anything in which I may help you, I will gladly. Shall I take home a message from you?"

"No."

"For the rest of my life I have no other object or aim but to help and serve others, and, first and foremost, our Cordelia; but to help her to fulfil her duty, not to forsake it. Can I do nothing?"

I answered somewhat sullenly, "No," and we turned our footsteps homewards. Home? I had no home. When we reached the threshold of my house, he drew me to him and kissed my forehead. I heard (though I scarcely listened) his assurances of affection, and his promise that to the end of our lives I should be his first care. His last words were these—

"I know that, for her sake, I can ask you to promise me."

"What?"

"That you will never voluntarily leave your husband."

"My husband! M. Corsand, I have no husband. He left me yesterday."

"Impossible! I saw him this morning."

"Where?"

"I did not speak to him, but I saw him walking quickly along the path which leads to the villa. You are not in a state to be reasoned with"—(I was now trembling from head to foot)—"but whatever may have given rise to this misfortune, promise me one thing—remain with him. I ask it in her name, I entreat it in my own."

He looked so pained that I could not be obdurate. Reluctantly I gave him the promise that *voluntarily* I would not leave my husband, and I also promised to write to him constantly and unreservedly.

We parted. Oh, these partings! and yet my own selfish grief absorbed me to such an extent, that I did not realize what it was to lose such a friend.

I entered the house. On reaching my own room, I saw my maid packing my clothes. To my mute look of astonishment, she answered that her master had just returned, and had given her orders to do so. His own servant was making preparations below, and we were to leave Naples in two days.

"I think master has had bad news, ma'am; there was some letters come for him this morning by post; and oh! please, I beg your pardon—but here is one for you, ma'am."

She put in my hands a note, which, from its faint violet scent and from the crest, I recognised as coming from the Princess. I tore it open.

"I have thought of nothing but you since we parted yesterday. How I grieve that my weakness allowed you to draw from me my fatal secret is more than I can express. I have doubly injured you, and I wish to be your friend. There is but one conduct possible for us under these painful circumstances—oblivion of the facts. I adjure you never to betray the secret of my love, of my grief. Let none ever know that we two poor women have marred each other's happiness for life. Willingly I was never your rival. Oh! that fatal absence! I have seen your husband. He is resolved to bear unflinchingly the misery he has inflicted on others, as well as on himself. No anger justifies a rupture between man and wife. Where there is only sorrow, the world always attributes shame, and brands one or both. The name you bear must be kept unstained. There is an end to the longest day, and what seems most difficult at first can be borne at last with a smile. I shall never lose sight of you or forget you. I am always your friend. I leave Naples in an hour. You must remain, for where could you go?"

"When did this letter come?"

"About ten minutes after I saw you go out, ma'am."

Three hours, then, had passed.

I left her to her preparations, and went to my sitting-room. I could not rally from the blow I had received. She was right. There was no refuge for me anywhere. Could I go to my father, and tell him I had been married from pique by a man who adored another woman? The haste of my marriage had been distressing to him. Sir Arthur's coarse, insolent letter to him had made him doubly susceptible on the fact that our marriage was an unequal one in point of birth, and a most imprudent one as to pecuniary affairs. I could not go to him, and tell him by what a hideous lie I had been deceived. I, Cordelia Ashley, who had given up with such regret my bright girlish visions of art and fame, to fall into such a trap. I, who had so sincerely and earnestly resolved to merge my whole being in love and duty to the man who I dreamed had loved me; I, who had been so ruthlessly betrayed.

Hatred, contempt, anger, filled my heart. I was sorry for the woman who suffered also from the same blow, but there was such a feeling of distrust towards her, that at times I hated her also. Then would come a base and cowardly protest. Why did she open my eyes? Oh! if I

had never known, I—but I crushed this vileness. I was glad I was awake. The struggle I went through during those two hours made me understand the words in that fatal letter. There were depths of resentment in my being which I learned for the first time. I seemed to have aged years in those hours.

Two hours had passed, and while I was still sitting lost in my thoughts, Gerard entered. I could not look at him.

"I have had letters which oblige me to return to England at once. I have given orders." His voice was entirely changed.

I did not speak.

"Do you hear, or is the shock too painful?"

I looked at him then.

Good Heavens! Was it possible that two days had so changed him?

I do not think his eyes rested on me a moment. He turned away, and then turned back, and in a husky voice again spoke—

"It is best to tell you I know all. My first impulse was to leave you for ever, but I have reflected. There is a consideration due to my name. Our separation would bring suspicion on both—disgrace on one. I will arrange differently. Why, why was the truth withheld from me?"

He almost used her words. How steeled I felt against him, though, with the weak softness of

my woman's nature, the sight of his haggard countenance had made me for a moment pity him.

"Just as you like."

I would not have condescended to complain. Yet why revenge on me his own infatuation? Was there no pity for the victim he had sacrificed? No shame at the villain's part he had played? And then came ever the piercing humiliation of the fact, that Mrs. Vibert had hurried our marriage, and that she had herself averred he had been startled, and somewhat anxious for it. He left the room. I saw no more of him that evening. He was at the door when I entered the carriage, and he got in after me.

That road, with its unearthly beauty, the Circean magic, which lingers over its promontories and bays, I looked at with eyes glazed by tears which I would not let fall. It is not a figurative exaggeration to say that my heart dropped blood as we proceeded in silence, side by side. I can trace that road by the pain and suffering of every step. I had thrown some books into the carriage, and I held one in my hand, but I read not a word of the printed page. I was reading again and again the letter, which I wore on my heart as a nun wears in penance some instrument of torture; the sharp point of the steel pressed me with every motion. Gerard never spoke but to make the indispensable inquiries about refresh-

ment, whether I would rest, &c.; he sat back, with his hat drawn over his eyes, staring through the windows, yet as utterly blind to all without, as I was. It was horrible.

As we reached the inn where we were to halt, my numbed limbs could not carry me, and, as persons who have borne silently an operation become insensible when the pain suddenly ceases and is over, the change was more than my strained nerves could bear, and I fainted.

When I came to myself, I was on a bed, and my Annina was bathing my hands and forehead.

"Let me die—let me die," I murmured, and then I was again unconscious.

When I came to my senses again, Annina was still by me, soothing and caressing me, for those affectionate and kind-hearted Italians always try to comfort anyone who is suffering.

"The Signor is gone," she said; "he was very afflicted when he saw you so ill. When you fainted again, he could not bear it any longer, but rushed out of the room."

I saw no more of Gerard that evening. He merely inquired of the servant how I was.

The next day, and the next, passed in much the same manner. I was becoming torpid and stupid.

At Civita Vecchia we parted with the servants,

and went on to Marseilles. On reaching Paris, I was ill for several days.

One night, as I was lying with closed eyes, thinking—thinking of the past, I heard some one enter the room, and bend over me. It was my husband. Without opening my eyes, I was conscious it was he. He took my hand, which was outside the bed, softly in his, and laid down his head on it, and I felt the tears fall hot and fast over it.

"Oh! if I could forget;" he murmured; "how beautiful she is, but the heart—the heart—why, why did Mrs. Vibert appeal so strongly to my weakness...."

I could have shrieked, the torture of those words was so acute. Yes, my poor beauty had tempted him, but his heart was hers, and he could not forget her. Was there ever humiliation so deep as mine?

Once again, when we arrived in London, as I reached my bedroom, I would have tottered and stumbled, had he not taken me in his arms with a vehemence and a force which almost suffocated me. He held me to him and pressed me in an embrace which was like fire; and yet, when he laid me on the bed, I met his eyes, and saw scorn and hatred in them. I ought to have spoken. I ought to have overwhelmed him with the fact that I knew his secret, but I could not; and there were times, once or twice, when I weakly yearned

to throw myself in his arms, and say, "Tell me it was all a lie—you could not have so deceived me;" but when I remembered the haste of our marriage, I was dumb.

We arrived. Gerard left me while he went to see his sister and aunt. He returned more like himself than I had yet seen him since that day at Naples. But it was only a momentary return. I was writing to. M. Corsand, and after dinner resumed my letter, finished, sealed it, and put it on the table for it to be posted.

He took up the letter and read the address. He turned to me with a face as white as death.

"While you are under my roof I forbid all intercourse with that man."

"With M. Corsand?"

"Yes. I command you never to write another line to him. If *he* was your first lover, *I* am your husband. I insist upon it."

His hand fell upon my shoulder with the weight of a blow. My blood boiled at this insult. He was afraid I should reveal his baseness, I suppose.

"Do you hear me?"

"I hear you, certainly."

"But you intend to disobey me."

I lost all patience, and rose to leave the room. He went to the door and placed himself before it.

"I must be answered. Refuse my just request, and we part for ever. Will you promise me?"

"Never, Gerard; never!"

"Listen, Cordelia. My whole being is changed. I have received a blow from which I shall never entirely recover, but all is not yet irrevocable. A hope has arisen in me that the Past may be put aside, that I may begin a new life, very different from that I at first had dreamed" — his voice broke as he spoke—"but still, there may be a little sweetness yet left for us; but it is on this condition only."

"Never, Gerard; never!" I could but reiterate the same words, there was such a boundless sense of wrong at my heart.

He drew aside and let me pass, and I went into my room.

How did we both pass that night?

The next morning my father arrived. He was shocked at seeing my looks. I said I had been ill in Paris, and that seemed to explain how changed I was.

* * * *

We had been two days in London, when the blow which Gerard had expected for some time, fell. He was called upon to pay £8,000, for a friend to whom he had given his signature. There was no escape from the bankruptcy court, had not my father come forward. My fortune, of which I

only was to draw the interest till his death, was at once placed in Gerard's hands, and a loan of £3000, from the money which was to be Sarah's, was added to it.

I think my father was proud to contrast his liberality on this occasion with Sir Arthur's meanness. Sir Arthur had written the most insulting letters about our marriage, but it was the family he so despised who came forward to rescue his grandson from this peril.

Sometimes I think that but for this Gerard and I might have understood each other, but he seemed afterwards more and more reserved and alienated from me, though frank and grateful to my father. My father told me that his reason for thus acting was, that Mrs. Vibert, in the letter she had written to him on her deathbed, had besought him to help Gerard, and had told him that but for her own hastiness, caused by his letter, I should have been able to have bestowed a fortune on my husband, that as it was we were all but penniless. "I owe Mr. Clayre something," said my father, "for he has saved you from two evils—that d——d Frenchman and the stage."

I burst into tears. Everything seemed to conspire against me.

The tears ended in hysterics, and again I was ill for many days.

During that time my father and my husband

were settling, as far as possible, our future prospects. My husband's debts were paid. It was my father's wish that Gerard should settle in England, but as soon as his debts were paid, he resolved upon leaving it.

* * * *

I was startled one morning by my father telling me that Gerard was going to India. A commission had been purchased for him by Sir Arthur, and he was to go in a fortnight. To that extent Sir Arthur opened his purse, to close it hermetically afterwards. Gerard had chosen the profession which would most promptly and effectually part us. I saw it all.

I had been beaten down by so many blows that I was insensible to what would have broken my heart a few weeks before. "And what am I to do?" I asked. Gerard was out, and my father and I were alone.

"Frampton has been consulted, and he says you must not dream of it. What do you say, Cordelia; will you come to us till you are well enough to join your husband?"

"I shall be very glad." I said this with all my heart. There was nothing in the chances of fate which could give me so much pleasure, at this moment, as to see my mother. With her was always peace, calm, consolation, and my bruised spirit yearned now for repose. Rest, after all

must go to Cordelia, he must see her. As Ivy had said, when she first spoke to Cordelia about him, he had a divine power of repentance. Once convinced he was wrong, his pride was torn to tatters, he humbled himself utterly and entirely till he was forgiven. He had even a little pity to spare for poor Mr. Ashley. He was the first cause of all the mischief. How Sir Arthur had slipped into such a coil of error was incomprehensible; but it should be explained. The liars and calumniators should be exposed. But first he must see Cordelia. Where was she?

Gerard went to the door of the next room and knocked. The servant opened it. To Gerard's inquiry, he answered that his master had gone to London, but if Monsieur would like to leave a message he could do so, as he was to return the next day.

Gerard said nothing, and the man was more convinced than ever of his insanity.

He thought for a moment, and felt instinctively that Ivy would know something of Cordelia; at all events, where to inquire about her. Her letter he had forgotten.

In two hours more he was on his road to Wroxton.

He arrived at two o'clock in the morning. He *walked* directly to the Ferry, resolved to go in

the moment the house was opened. It was a wild and tempestuous night. Every minute seemed an age while he waited, and in his tumult o feeling the storm which raged was sympathetic to his soul.

We must remember, he was young, passionately in love, and that the vicissitudes of emotion he had undergone during the last week had almost overwhelmed a frame weakened by long illness and an exhausting climate.

He paced up and down in front of the house, pausing a few minutes every now and then, while the rain beat upon him and almost took away his breath. After a while, the storm was calmed. At last, about six o'clock, he saw a window open, and just as he was going to the porch, the door opened and a little girl came out.

She looked at him very gravely for a minute as she stood in the centre of the door.

"You are Gerard."

"Yes."

"I am Annie. I know all about you and Cordelia."

"Annie?"

"You must not go in; you will kill Cordelia."

"Cordelia! Is she there?"

"You will kill her, I tell you. She is very, very ill. Mr. Frampton says the least surprise would kill her. Are you sorry?"

Gerard could not speak, but leaned against the porch as Annie closed the door and stood looking very compassionately at him.

"If you will wait, I will go to see. Will you wait?"

"Yes."

"Only a minute or two, and then I will go in; but will you not go further from the house?"

"Yes."

But he did not move.

"Ivy said—" but she stopped, for she saw Gerard was not listening to her. He seemed to hear something, and was bending forward with an almost agonised expression on his face.

BOOK IX.

CHAPTER I.

WE must now return to Cordelia. She left Florence, as we have said, immediately after Norton's death, and arrived in Milan with the resolve to think henceforth of her art alone. She felt that her husband and herself were parted now for ever, and parting with him meant also separation from Ivy. Her profession cut her off from her home; and thus, with the exception of Liesa, there was not a human being who could be of present comfort or even interest to her.

At first she felt perfectly calm. A factitious strength upheld her, and she looked firmly forward to her future life. After all, it was but the old dream which had returned.

To live, alone and self-relying, with a beautiful art to study, and in which to achieve success, was the limit of her aspirations. Her affections

had been torn and trampled on, and she would henceforth live a life in which there could be no such sorrow.

There was defiance in her heart as she stood on the stage the night of her first appearance at La Scala, and sang "loud and sweet" the beautiful music of her part in "Anna Bolena." There were tones of piercing sweetness in her voice, and her whole bearing was that of one inspired and possessed, as it were, by the fiery spirit of music.

She never flagged for a moment; there was a light in her eyes and a crimson flush on her cheek, which were never dimmed or faded; and as she stood to receive the plaudits of the crowd, no Greek muse could have worn a more exalted and divine air of triumph.

The magnificent theatre, with its tier on tier of rapt listeners, never rung with wilder shouts of applause. The orchestra was stirred by the enthusiasm which ran like a flame around, and played with a force and expression which seemed electric, while over all was heard the silvery cadence, the magical trill, the prolonged swell of that enchanting voice.

It was early in 1859, a time when men's minds were easily excited; the pulse of the nation was throbbing high, and it was susceptible to all beauty, and appreciative of all excellence.

When the beautiful *prima donna* left the stage, having been called and recalled before the curtain more times than we can enumerate, there was a sudden resolve to make a procession and follow her with *vivas* to her lodging.

When Cordelia entered the modest *fiacre* which she had engaged, she found the horses had been taken out, and that she was to be borne home in triumph.

For one moment she recoiled, but the desperate and fierce feelings at her heart conquered this, and she stepped in with a cold, passionless smile on her face, and heard with unshrinking calm the shout that announced her appearance.

The glare of the torches, the throngs which closed behind her, all uttering the most impassioned *vivas*, the burst of music as she entered her dwelling, seemed all parts of a pageant in a dream, which neither surprised nor moved her. She simply accepted them, and passed on to the balcony to utter her thanks with the same calmness which had been hers all the evening. She then went into her room, and waited till the people had dispersed. When the street was quiet she stepped out again upon the balcony, and looked after the fast receding forms. "All which moves my life henceforth must come from without—within all is dark and silent like this room; but the light and the praise and the

"Carlo! so soon; he only left me three weeks ago!"

"Yes; he was brought here the day before yesterday. He has lost his arm, and there is an injury in the ankle-bone which will lame him for life."

She led the way, and on a little pallet at the extreme right of a row of beds, devoted to the use of the most badly wounded, was Carlo; emaciated, pale, wan-looking, but with the same fire in the eyes and sweetness in the smile. He smiled when he saw Cordelia.

"I did my best, Madame," he said.

"I am sure you did, Carlo."

"The worst is that I cannot be a soldier again. I am lame, and I have lost my arm; I cannot fight for Italy any more."

"You can serve Italy in other ways," said Miss Beecham.

"But, before I am well so much will be done."

"If so, then you can more easily find your work."

Carlo seemed delighted to see a relative of M. Corsand's; and he, interested by what he saw and heard of the lad, asked Miss Beecham when she thought he would be well enough to leave the hospital, as he wanted an Italian servant, and he should be glad to employ Carlo till a better *occupation* could be found for him.

Cordelia spoke soothingly to the poor lad, whose only regret was that he was too maimed for further service, and he listened to her as to an oracle.

Just as she was leaving him, he called her back, and asked her to open his knapsack, which was under his bed, and to take out a pocketbook which was in it. She did so. He requested her to open it, and out of it there came a letter, addressed in large round letters to Susie Dering, care of Miss Ashley, The Ferry, Devonshire.

Cordelia started.

"That letter has been written for me, and I want to send it," he said.

"Who is Susie?"

"My friend, my wife to be. Poor girl, how anxious she will be."

"Do you know the family she is with?" said Cordelia, with a faint flush displacing her marble paleness.

"No; the good Miss Ivy sent her there."

There was a pause. The dear familiar names were listened to, as one listens when far out in a ship, amid the roaring ocean, to church bells ringing on the shore we have left; while we are cut off and alienated from all the sweet familiar modes of being, with new experiences to be endured and struggled through, those sounds tell us of the old life we have now

abandoned, with a piercing and accusing pathos.

"I will post this letter for you, Carlo."

"And there is another thing, Madame. Do you see some papers, a very thick packet, tied with a green cord? Those were given to me by a Croat, who died in that bed next to mine. He said he had the secret of a great lady in these papers, and that he was taking them to her. If she did not reward him, he would sell the secret to her husband's heirs."

"But what can I do with them?"

"Will you send them to her? I could not read the address, for the characters are different from ours."

Cordelia took them and put them by with the letter.

"I will come to see you every day, Carlo."

She then joined her companions, who were talking together. M. Corsand parted from Miss Beecham, and Cordelia and he were left together.

"While you were behind us talking to Carlo, I saw a procession of the great ladies of Milan entering to fulfil their offices of nurses, readers, attendants to these poor men. Some were in gala dresses, with all their jewels, as if they were going to a court festival. It was a strange, affecting sight. Then passed some *sœurs de charité*. Among them I believe are many of the

highest ladies, who prefer a monastic disguise when they perform their charities. *Les sœurs blanches et les sœurs grises.*"

As they walked on, one of these *sœurs grises* passed on towards the row of pallets where Carlo was. As she brushed past them among the crowd, Cordelia involuntarily shuddered. She recognised the Princess. She turned her own eyes away so quickly that she did not see the recognition was not mutual. The Princess looked at her and looked at her companion, and then passed on. When she reached the pallet she was in search of, she asked the name of the occupant, and it was pointed to her on a label at the head of the bed, "Pietro Romani."

"Who occupied this bed before he died?"

Carlo recognised her clear, imperative tones, and having always felt the greatest repugnance to her, muffled himself up in his coverlet, and remained silent.

The infirmary attendant made some inquiries. "The last occupant was a Croat, whose name we could never write."

"Where is he?"

"Dead!"

"Did he leave no message? I am one of a community formed for the especial service and protection of those poor fellows who obeyed their military duties, and fought against your people,

but who in their hearts sympathised with them. They have not in all cases been treated as generously as defeated foes should be at the hands of a great nation." There was an indescribable irony in her tone.

The man looked annoyed. "I know of no message."

She paused a little, and glanced around, but was too short-sighted to recognise Carlo. As she moved on, she said, "The hospital is crowded with visitors to-day; it seems quite a fashionable promenade."

The man she addressed bowed, and then turned to reply to some one else who had asked him the name of the elderly man with dark hair and white beard, with a beautiful lady in black on his arm, who had just passed through.

"M. Corsand. He gave me his name and a contribution for this ward. When well, that poor lad yonder accompanies them. The lady is his wife, I believe."

The Princess heard him and stepped up close to the bed; involuntarily Carlo raised his eyes. She recognised him at once, but said nothing, and passed on.

When Cordelia reached her house, she asked M. Corsand to step in with her to re-direct Carlo's letter in a more legible manner; and he complied with her request to put it in the post.

When he had left her, she took out the packet. It looked like a certificate, for there were heavy seals evidently on it but it was folded up tightly, and tied round and round. The address was to the widow of Ivan Vassiloff, now Princess Bifrons, written in German characters. She let it fall as if it had stung her. In that packet, she felt sure, were the positive proofs of the secret she had guessed, and which involved fortune and fair fame to her enemy. Her head swam round as she remembered the bitter sorrows she had suffered through that woman. They were, in fact, far bitterer than she knew. She folded it, rang the bell, and ordered a servant to go to the principal hotels, and to inquire for the Princess Bifrons, and give it to her.

She then sat down to the piano, and practised with the greatest assiduity all the music for her part that evening. She seemed to fear that if she gave herself one moment for thought she would upset the charmed equilibrium to which she had bound herself.

When her dinner was brought to her, the servant brought back the packet. He had searched all the principal hotels, had found that the Princess had lodged in one of them, but had left that afternoon. She was going towards Switzerland, but no one knew precisely; for she was very capricious, and would change her route

twenty times if it so pleased her. He had thought it best to bring back the packet.

Cordelia reflected. She would not keep the packet; but where to send it was the question. She determined to enclose it to M. Corsand. She knew that he would take measures that it should reach the Princess. She re-directed it, and sent it off to the post at once. The dinner was sent away untasted. She dressed herself with the greatest care. "These are the hours, now, in which I truly live; the rest of my life is a dream," she murmured to herself, as she stepped before the curtain; and as soon as the vociferous tumult of welcome was appeased, prepared to sing "Casta Diva."

Three times did the chorus of applause sink and then rise again with deafening sound before she was allowed to begin. She bowed lower and lower; it seemed as if she were tied to a stake and was being stoned, so terribly did the plaudits oppress both brain and heart: they seemed hurled at her. At last there was a pause, and she raised her pale, beautiful face to commence. What was in her throat that she could not utter a single sound? Was it emotion? The audience deemed it so, and it was a prelude for another demonstration. A glass of water was brought to her, and she tried again. Silence was demanded, and you might have heard a pin drop. The

whole mass of faces, from pit to topmost gallery, were fixed upon hers, and crushed her down with a sense of impotent weakness. She could neither resist nor satisfy them. She felt her blood boil up and rush to her temples, as with both hands pressed to the white, full throat, she seemed trying to disenfranchise the imprisoned notes. At last, after an effort which was like the rending of a limb, she succeeded in forcing out a single sound; but the effort was more than she could bear. The note ended in a faint cry, and she fell forwards insensible. When she recovered she was on her bed in her lodging. M. and Madame Corsand were with her and a doctor. He pronounced it an attack of nervous fever.

"And my voice?" asked Cordelia.

"You must not sing for many weeks—I should say months."

CHAPTER II.

THE fiat of the physician was received by Cordelia in silence; and her kind friends never knew the pain it gave her. For days they were indefatigable in their care and attention, and while they were with her she would not think of her misfortune. It was during the long evenings and nights that the battle was fought, in solitude and silence. There was no childish or superstitious fear mingled with her regret. She knew that the life of mingled exertion and emotion she had led the last few months would, not unnaturally, produce this result. No mortal possesses a charmed life; and in the hours of our great trials and temptations, the presence of angels ministering to us can alone prevent the havoc which passion, and ambition, and self, those arch tempters, make of the frail human tenements they would mould to their will. But those angels do not come unless the tempters have been conquered and their power disarmed.

At first, perhaps, there was that defiant and half-ironical acceptance of sorrow which speaks

in Oreste, when he exclaims "Grâce au ciel, mon malheur passe mon espérance." But that passed away, and left a softer frame of mind. One escape from herself, one refuge from all her private sorrows, was shut out. Where should she now turn, was the ever-recurring thought. Perhaps, also, beneath all the intricate fibres of motives and secondary motives, which exist in all, there was something of consolation in not having again to face that applause, and bear those triumphs which were such a cruel mockery to the desolation of her heart.

Art sustains and exalts; it is a consoler and a hope-giver; but this can only be—and we cannot repeat this too often—when it is followed with single-mindedness. If it be vain to pursue it for the sake of self-assertion and self-glory, it is equally vain to expect from it gifts which it cannot bestow. The laurel cannot be bruised into strength and sweetness like the Vine. Art crowns, Faith redeems. The cultivation of art in one of its utterances, simultaneously with the development of our own souls, is the noblest and most satisfying work a mortal can undertake; indeed, the result of a life experience in the noblest natures finds its readiest expression in art; but art cannot compensate for the want of that development; and the man or woman who dreams he or she can pursue

it, while they have paralysed their affections, deadened their hearts, and stifled their consciences, have no chance of drawing a healthy vitality from it. What joy can it bestow, what soothing can it administer, what aspiration can it fulfil? Like the King of the Black Islands, it is marble to the waist.

There came also the thoughts of how she should provide for herself in future. Her voice would return, and she might resume her profession; but for the present she had little to depend upon. Norton's legacy had been sent to liquidate Gerard's debt to her father; with the profits of her engagement, she had repaid M. Corsand; and the overplus was a hundred pounds. Her present engagement must be forfeited; and her first care, as soon as she could be moved from her bed to sit up for a few hours in the drawing-room, was to send for the manager.

He was furious. Cordelia might have gauged the value he had set upon her by his unbridled violence at losing her. Excited by disappointed avarice, he presented a very ugly spectacle. His voice was raised, and his words were not carefully chosen; but at the moment when Cordelia, spent and weak as she was, rose to put an end to the interview, M. Corsand was announced: she sank down on her seat, and *begged* him to discuss and conclude the matter.

It is marvellous how men of the species of the manager alter their tone when in a matter of this kind they confront a man and not a woman.

M. Corsand had not his namesake's impressive manner, but he was singularly gentlemanly, and a thorough man of business. His courteous firmness overpowered the other's bullying repartee; and after a short argument, the man was dismissed. He grumbled, and cast no amicable look on Cordelia and on her champion, as he bowed himself out of the room.

He was baffled at every point; for, enraged as he was at the forced rupture of the engagement, he had hoped that by menace and fierce reproach he would have obtained from a woman, alone and ill, some good compensation for his disappointment and his loss. But the unexpected appearance of the Frenchman had changed the result of the interview. That evening at a table of the principal *café* his curses, not loud but deep, spared neither the prima donna nor the friend who had appeared at so opportune a moment.

Of course the sudden and serious illness of the prima donna and the loss of her voice were publicly discussed. Inquiries were also made as to the person who had befriended her in this difficulty of a broken engagement.

"Who is he?" asked one of the persons present.

"A Frenchman."

"His name?"

"Corsand. Without his maladetto interference, I might have managed something."

The person who questioned him wrote down the name of Corsand on a tablet.

"What is she going to do?" asked another. "So young, so beautiful, and with such a reputation. What a dreadful misfortune it must be to her! Will she ever recover her voice?"

"She will recover it fast enough, but not this season."

"What will she do?"

"She goes with her *friend* to Switzerland, I believe." And then the conversation turned upon other subjects.

It was true that Cordelia had consented to go to Switzerland with the Corsands. They were bound for Lucerne, where they had hired a château for the summer. She was to go with them as far as Lucerne, and then find her way to Paris and England.

She had resolved upon eking out her slender resources by giving lessons in singing and music. Her physician recommended her having recourse to her native air for bracing and restoring tone to her nerves, and she thought that in London she might find pupils enough to occupy her time and pay for her maintenance.

She was too ill, and the time was too short, to go to the hospital again; but she had a visit from Miss Beecham, who told her that Carlo was limping about the ward in good spirits, and in almost confirmed health.

"How much better you look than in Florence," said Cordelia.

"I am so thankful; I am so full of hope, so certain now that I shall see my Italy free and united, that health, strength, almost youth, have returned to me. Life, for the first time for so many years, seems to me so beautiful. Eleven years has not been too long to wait for this."

"Shall you stay here?"

"Till I am no longer wanted; but that will not be yet. After Milan I shall go to Naples and to Sicily when their turn comes. And when all is over I shall devote myself to the education of poor orphan children. There are funds which our friend M. Corsand has long devoted to that use."

Miss Beecham's eyes sparkled as she spoke. The long vista of usefulness which she saw before her gave a divine joy to her heart.

"And in this you find compensation and comfort?"

"Not exactly comfort or consolation. I still mourn for my loved one, but that grief has sunk down like a pearl into my heart, and above it there

flows a whole sea of blessedness. I am doing that which he would have liked me best to do; he consecrated me to it himself, and it seems to unite me more closely to him. All I do is in harmony with the love which was mine, and is mine, though no longer present. I think that having gone through the suffering of loss myself, I am better qualified to sustain those who are undergoing it, and that gives an inexpressible sweetness to my undying regret."

Cordelia listened, and every word thrilled her with a conviction of her own shortcomings.

"For a long time," continued Miss Beecham, "I had embittered my own grief, by resentment and the most passionate indignation. My betrothed was an artist, a wood carver, and had my stepmother permitted our marriage, he would probably have continued his profession and refrained from joining the army. But she gave a refusal, which was to be irrevocable, and in despair he enrolled himself among the Tuscan youth who volunteered to oppose Radetzky, and fell at Curtatone! For years I hardened myself against the whole world, and my grief was intolerable; but since I have come here, since I have with all my heart and soul thrown myself into this employment, all the bitterness and rebellion have been extracted from my grief. Not at once, for I commenced my work with a cold and rigid stoicism.

But as soon as I had been unavoidably drawn to love those I tended and to melt in compassion over them, my own heart seemed to thaw back into human sympathy, and my wounds were healed of all that corroding anguish which resentment causes. Nothing else can do it. It is only by serving men and women thoroughly that we can lose the sense of wrong inflicted by men and women. But it must not be undertaken in a spirit of self-torture and self-punishment. Forgive me for having spoken so much at length about myself. When do you leave Milan?"

"In two days."

"Carlo will be well enough to accompany you."

"I am glad M. and Madame Corsand go first, and Carlo and I join them. Carlo will be with them at Lucerne; I go on to England."

They parted. Miss Beecham returned to her work, and Cordelia mused long and seriously after her departure. Miss Beecham passed like a shadow over Cordelia's life, but the influence she exercised was not shadowy. It was a reality, and its benefit was lifelong. She was rejoiced that her friend had found her vocation, and she understood now why she had been so tried by hers. Ever since the meeting with her husband a poison had corroded all her once pure and beautiful enjoyment of the course she had chosen.

That poison was resentment and an ever-gnawing jealousy.

She looked upon Miss Beecham with envy. Not that the act of stirring gruel with one's own hand is intrinsically of more value than cultivating a gift for any particular art ("In my Father's house there are many mansions"); but it was the spirit which had animated Miss Beecham in her hospital service, which had been so deficient in herself, and in that lay the wide disparity of the result.

She resolved to go to England; there she might, by giving singing lessons, maintain herself. And in the absolute solitude which would be perforce hers, she might continue the studies which would, when her health was re-established and her voice restored, aid her in her art.

Cordelia did not believe her voice was taken away from her by a sudden judgment. She understood better the inevitable laws of cause and effect; and beyond the natural anxieties for immediate subsistence she did not give it a thought, but she profited by this sudden pause which was forced upon her by her own rashness and imprudence, for more impartial reflection on the trials of her fate.

She looked pale and wan the morning she left Milan; but anyone who had looked into her face would have seen a softer look in her eyes and a

lovely gentleness in her smile, which since the day she had first seen Gerard in Florence had never been there.

The party reached Lucerne, and without making any stay there, Cordelia proceeded alone to England *via* Paris.

She inquired in Paris for Liesa, and found at the address she had given her a note, containing only a few words of adieu.

Liesa had suffered so much in health from the change of climate that she had been ill almost the whole time, and the physician she had consulted had advised her to try England, if she could not return to Italy. Her funds were so diminished that she could not return to Florence. She had barely enough to take her to London. Her singing master in Paris had given her a letter of recommendation to a singing master in London, and she hoped that as the spring was coming on she might recover her health. She would write again as soon as she was settled.

Cordelia gave orders that her letters should be forwarded, and left Paris at once.

She knew that M. Corsand had not returned from Africa, and there was a feeling in her heart that prevented her writing to him. She knew that if she wrote she must write fully and truthfully, and she knew that what she had to say would grieve him in every way—grieve him as

regarded the personal misfortune, which must alter her whole prospects for a time, and grieve him still more if she told him of all the fresh animosity and yet bitterer severance between herself and her husband. She therefore passed through Paris, and no letter or message left a trace of her future intentions or abode.

CHAPTER III.

CORDELIA had not been in London many weeks, when she received a note forwarded to her through her agents from Liesa. There had been some delay. Liesa wrote from —— hospital. Cordelia hastened to her, wondering by what combination of circumstances the young Russian had been driven there, and alarmed at the time which had intervened since the letter had been written. Liesa was in bed, and one glance at her face told Cordelia that all human anxiety for Liesa was now superfluous; the most powerful hand of all, was now clasped round her.

"Dear madame, how good; I knew you would come, though the time seems long since I have written."

"But what has brought you here, my poor Liesa?"

"I will tell you. I studied very hard in Paris, but the cold made me so ill, I began to be afraid I should lose my voice altogether, which would have been my greatest misfortune, as you know. I

suppose I was imprudent too, and exposed myself to the cold too much."

"Do not speak fast, Liesa, it makes you cough."

"I had a letter to one of the orchestra in London, and my doctors told me the air of Paris was so sharp, that perhaps London would agree with me better. I left. I caught a worse cold in the steamer, and though a benevolent woman gave me the address of a lodging to go to, when I arrived, I feared I should never reach it. Well, I was ill there for a fortnight; all my money was going, and I did not know what to do. I went out to try and find my way to this musician. Whether I was too weak to go out, or too careless, I cannot tell; I was knocked down by a cab as I was crossing the street, my chest was much hurt, and they brought me here."

"But you cannot stay here."

"Where can I go?"

"With me."

"At the house I left, they have my clothes and music to pay them; but I have no more money."

While Cordelia and Liesa were thus talking, Cordelia saw a man, apparently a medical man, leave a bed near which he was standing, and come up to her as if with the intention of speaking to her. She did not recognise him for the moment, and turned away. She remembered afterwards it was Mr. Frampton. But this incident

confirmed her resolve to remove Liesa from the hospital, and to take her to her own lodgings. She saw that the poor girl was irrevocably sentenced, and she felt that on her must devolve the duty of holding the feeble hand, and guiding the weary feet in that last difficult path. Her whole heart melted in tenderness over one so forlorn and in such a strait.

"Liesa dear, you must go home with me."

"Dear madame, I am good for nothing; I cannot crawl even from bed to chair now; I shall give you so much trouble. Let me wait here till I am well."

Cordelia shook her head.

She consulted with the authorities of the hospital, saw the physician who attended Liesa, who confirmed her worst fears, and after some preliminaries, the permission for the removal was obtained, and the removal itself effected.

It was an infinite consolation to Cordelia, to see the poor girl laid on her own bed, and with the usual vicissitudes of her disease, pronounce herself better at once.

"I did not like being in the hospital," she said, "but I knew I should be taken care of in a certain way; and I had no means to have a doctor or nurse at my own lodgings; and I was so anxious to get better and to begin to work. I shall soon be well now."

Poor Liesa found, however, that even under this improved phase of nursing, she was getting weaker and weaker, and the fear, or rather the truth, made itself evident to her.

And now her goodness of nature, and a *naïveté* of disposition peculiarly hers, came out with a sweetness which was very precious to Cordelia.

Liesa was quite willing to die. She said this world had been rather hard for her.

"When I was well I did not think much of anything but my profession; but as I lie here, a great many things are made clear to me. I now understand the cause of so many of my deficiencies; I know why I never could feel as others feel. No one had taught me as a child how to love; a mother only can do that. It is a strange thing to die and to know that no one has ever kissed me as their dearest."

"A mother may forget her child, Liesa; but there is One who never forgets."

"I know it, and am contented; but I understand now why I was so uncouth and awkward, and had so little imagination about me. As a child I never knew a mother's knee, a father's caress, a brother's or sister's play, and so half my nature was not called out. It does not matter now that all will so soon be over, but I can explain to myself much which used to puzzle me in the

difference between human beings; between you and me, for instance."

This mournful, uncomplaining patience powerfully attracted Cordelia's affection. In Florence she had been drawn to her by pity for one so lonely and so young, but now it was the true tenderness of sympathy which Liesa excited.

She learned from her and from that great Teacher whose lessons are so heartbreaking, yet so salutary. Shadowed over by coming death, her own heart was stilled and purified. How poor seemed life and life's fierce animosities; how narrow the space left for impetuous, impatient, and unforgiving thoughts, when this august presence pervaded all around.

Cordelia earned enough by giving lessons to maintain herself, and to provide a few comforts and medical attendance for Liesa. She left her during the mornings—she usually dozed or slept at that time, after the fatigue of moving to have her bed made, &c.—and returned to an early dinner, after which time she never left her.

What was most dreary and painful, was to see Liesa instinctively, yet blindly, groping about for that sweet cup of natural affection which had been denied to her, while to Cordelia it had been held brimming and running over, and had by her been put aside or cast away.

Husband, father, mother, sister, friends, Cor-

delia possessed all these, but she was as lonely as Liesa. And there was the additional bitterness in *her* heart of having—a good deal by her own fault too—once tasted all this, and of having now foregone it. She had been unforgiving towards Gerard, impatient towards Sarah, disobedient to her father.

One of the best qualities of Cordelia's noble and generous, though faulty nature, was her candour. She perhaps exaggerated her own shortcomings, but there was a womanliness in her softness towards others, and harsh judgment of herself, which was worth all its onesidedness.

Liesa looked upon her as something enskied and sainted. She knew from the remembrance of certain episodes in Florence, that she was very unhappy, and conjectured that the same person who played such a peculiar part in her own fate, was the evil genius in Cordelia's. But how could she exorcise her?

Sometimes as Liesa sat up, propped up by pillows in the bed, with her music spread before her, for it was a pleasure to her to look at and handle the songs she would no more sing, she would persuade Cordelia to go out for a walk.

One day Cordelia consented to do so; she was glad to go away from Liesa, where she might indulge, without fearing its effect on the invalid, her despondency and regrets.

It was late, one misty afternoon, that she wandered along absorbed in her own melancholy meditations, till she found herself on one of the bridges over the Harrow canal. Though it was the sweet month of May, the raw coldness of the day made her draw her mantle closer round her, but she stopped to look for a minute at the dark greenish-black water below, and at the scene around. It was not a cheering prospect. The houses looked saturated with damp, and the stunted trees in the tiny little gardens, looked spectral through the smoke. It was a world seen through a veil, and all seemed so unreal, that one might reasonably expect that when the fog cleared away, the faint apparition of houses and trees and chimneys would vanish also. While Cordelia looked, there came floating sluggishly towards her a great black barge, gloomy as a gigantic hearse. It added to the sombre effect of the landscape; its motion seemed mysterious, there was nothing visible by which it could be propelled; but it followed as by some spell the distant sound of horses trampling along the bank. Suddenly there was a dispersion of the heavy clouds, and the western sky displayed with a majestic defiance its red sunset. This opaque flame-coloured background gave a gorgeous effect to all before it. The windows of the houses glowed like strings of pendant jewels, or as some

instantaneously-kindled, enchanted Luminara,* and lighted with this splendour one shore of the canal. The water was like molten copper, and the black barge passed by in the glow of a solid column of sunshine, which fell athwart it, and a long golden shimmer in the water tracked its path.

"Quite Venetian," said a voice near her, as a man, evidently an indubitable cockney, bent over the bridge, apparently struck by the spectacle. There are some persons who can only admire something English, by comparing it with something foreign, proving often by such comparisons their utter want of appreciation of both English and foreign beauty.

His exclamation roused Cordelia, and she turned away. As she dropped her veil, quick footsteps passed her, and she had only time to swerve aside to give room to a tall man who brushed hastily by her. She looked up mechanically, and caught the pale profile of Gerard Clayre. It was the day he had walked about the streets in utter recklessness of purpose, after his last interview with Sir Arthur. He looked neither to the right nor to the left, but hurried on. It was a strange coincidence, but Cordelia's heart felt like lead, as she retraced her steps homewards. What had brought

* The illumination which takes place once in three years at Pisa *is called* the Luminara.

him back? Were they so near each other, and yet how far, how far!

Liesa looked very tired when she reached home, and asked to be put to bed.

"What has tired you so?" asked Cordelia.

"I have again written to the Princess; I wrote yesterday also. Three words only, to tell her I am here and very ill, that I should have died in a hospital but for you."

"When will she receive it?"

"She may be in England, but if even she is in Paris, it will reach her in a day or two."

"She is the only person who knew your parents, you said!"

"Yes!" answered Liesa, in a dreamy voice.

"Would you like to see her?"

"Yes, for one reason I should."

She looked very much exhausted, and Cordelia sat by the bed with an aching heart. There was more fever and more weakness. The thin face was of one transparent waxen hue, except the deep red stain on the cheeks; the eyes were dilated, and the lips looked thin and drawn over the white teeth. She was very quiet, and her cough had ceased. Cordelia read to her, till she dozed, and then sat motionless by her side.

The watch ticking on the mantel-piece, as in loud protest against the silence, was all she heard, except the distant roll of the carriages. It was

getting quite dark, but she did not like to disturb Liesa by ringing for lights. She felt that the scene was closing, and that a deeper dark was insensibly drawing round that bed. She did not exactly envy Liesa, but she thought that death was easier than life.

While Cordelia thus mused, she heard Liesa move, some inarticulate murmur came to the girl's lips, and then she suddenly sat up in the bed, and putting out her hands as if holding out a piece of music, she began singing in a voice strong, but almost harsh, fragments of that most mournful song—

"Non mi chiamate più biondina bella,
Chiamatemi biondina isventurata.
Se delle isventurate n'è nel mondo,
Una di quelle mi posso ben chiamare.
Getto una palma al mare e mi va a fondo;
Agli altri il piombo veggo navigare:
Che domine ho fatt'io in questo mondo?
Ho l'oro in mano e mi diventa piombo.
Che domine ho mai fatto a questa gente?
Ho l'oro in mano e mi diventa niente.

Alfine morirò, che n'averai?
Per me sia messa in ordine la croce.
E le campane suonar sentirai,
Cantare il miserere a bassa voce.
E in mezzo della chiesa mi vedrai
Con gli occhi chiusi e con le mani in croce.
E arriverai a dire or me ne pento,
Non occor altro quando il fuoco è spento!
Allora tu sarai ben ripetente,
Io sarò morta e non m' importa niente."

Cordelia touched the bell, for she was afraid of moving; she felt this was the delirium which often precedes death in consumption, and sent for the physician. The luscious sweetness of the voice was gone, but its pathos was terrible.

Cordelia bent over her and whispered, "Liesa, Liesa;" but the girl did not know her, and went on with her mournful song.

"Non occor altro quando il fuoco e spento,"

she repeated.

The door opened, and some one entered softly.

"Liesa!" said a voice, and a woman came up to the bed.

"Allora tu sarai ben ripetente,
Io sarò morta e non m' importa niente."

"Liesa!" called the voice imperatively, in spite of a ring of anguish in its tone.

The girl had sunk back, murmuring with the mournful iteration of an ever-recurring wave against a rock,

"Non occor altro quando il fuoco e spento."

"Is she dying?" said the figure; and as the servant brought in the lights, Cordelia recognised the Princess. Her face was pale, but beneath its apparent calmness was a deep emotion.

"Is she much worse this evening?" she asked;

bed, the Princess drew her head on her bosom.

When Cordelia returned she found them thus; and now that Liesa's face had lost its fatal colouring, and was deadly pale, for the first time Cordelia saw there was a resemblance between the two.

Again there was a silence. The poor girl pressed her cheek closer to the cheek which leaned over her. "I have dreamed of this," she said. She opened her eyes and saw Cordelia. She drew Cordelia's hand in hers and pressed it to her lips.

"You have been so good; but it is sweet to die here." She opened her eyes again, and looked at the Princess. "You promise?"

"I do."

Then bubbled up to her lips again the air which seemed to haunt her,

"Non occor altro quando il fuoco e spento."

She sought to raise herself once more, but fell back on the shoulder which supported her,—and it was over.

"She is dead," said Cordelia.

The pale woman at her side started: the expression on her face long haunted Cordelia. There was such abject terror and self-reproach *in it.*

She placed the head on the pillow and looked at it for a moment.

"Thank you for your goodness to her," she said.

She gave one more look and then turned away, and went down-stairs. It flashed through Cordelia's mind that she ought to have told her of the packet she had received at Milan, but it was then too late to call her back; and she also thought that it would be best to be silent about it, till she knew whether M. Corsand had forwarded it.

CHAPTER IV.

LIESA was buried.

At Kensal Green, a few weeks after, might be seen a tomb with the initials L. V. on it. Beneath them are engraved the words

"NON OCCOR ALTRO QUANDO IL FUOCO E SPENTO."

Most persons who understood them, wondered at the heathenish despair of such an inscription.

Cordelia mourned for the poor girl sincerely. The strange half-developed nature with which she had had less congeniality than compassion, in health, had been so softened and modified by illness, that she had learned to love her with a true sisterly love. All the orders for Liesa's funeral had been given by the Princess Bifrons. It had taken place on the fourth morning after the death. There was a profound feeling of disgust in Cordelia's heart, at the heartlessness of the unnatural mother; and of indignation at her sin. It swallowed up her own resentment at the sense of wrong as regarded herself, which also rankled in her mind. But Cordelia might

have spared some of her condemnation. The Princess *had* felt the blow. She had made no scene at the deathbed, for her nerves were too strong, her pride too indomitable, but the blow had been felt. The knowledge that the woman she had striven so hard to ruin had, at that identical time, acted a mother's part to her own child, had stung her to the quick. It was this which had made her yield to Liesa's request. The heart which had had so little power to sway for good the actions or the character, possessed vitality enough to suffer remorse and grief.

To a woman of such indomitable will, to dream of giving up a long-cherished scheme, to consent to atone for evil done, to promise to serve where she hated, was a proof that she suffered. That piece of girlhood cast away to sink or swim in the battle of life, and so early submerged, touched the strong life, of which she was so proud, in its most vulnerable point. Apparently so alien to all her calculations and ambitious schemes, yet, successful in crumbling one of them to the dust, the poor existence linked to hers by a shame she had thought to blot out, had had an angel's strength, to shake one sin from her soul. It passed across her mind, as she sat in her luxurious home, with its flowers and its birds in their golden captivity, and its pomp and its internal completeness, that had she done her duty, and not

with such a ruthless hand torn away and then cauterised the link between Liesa and herself, a source of human feeling would have refreshed her arid existence, and satisfied in part her discontented soul, to which nothing around could give solace. Over the sin had a tender growth of love been fostered, some of its deformity would have been hidden.

It might have been! Alas! there are no words which slay like those. By all the misery of this unavailing regret, Liesa was avenged, though Cordelia knew it not.

But the unfortunate child had claimed something at her hands. She would fulfil it. If it were a sacrifice, so much the better. It was a tardy but willingly offered holocaust. It was the only opiate to the gnawing sense of regret which was growing with a sudden and retributive power in her heart. Every one noticed that the Princess Bifrons seemed to have lost her good looks and her spirits.

"There is an enormons fibre of superstition in these Russian women," said a philosophical friend of hers, one evening at her house, after she had conversed with him, in an unusually serious tone, of the observances of her faith, and who had escaped afterwards to a knot of men in the back drawing-room; "they may lead as gay lives as you like, but beneath it all they are devotees in

a certain barbaric, mystical fashion. It is a pity, but it is the fact—"

"But, our dear Princess does not seem well," said the Russian attaché to whom he addressed himself, "and that may explain her serious tone this evening."

"A week ago I thought I had never seen her so brilliant; she looked like a spirit of fire and dew."

"But to-night, mon cher, she looks so pale, so aged——"

"*Journalière* certainly; but what mortal mixture of earth's mould could resist this climate? June—bah!"

It was also noticed by the Princess's attendants, when they read to her at night, that there were often a redness and a moisture in her eyes, which could scarcely be excited by the pathos of the books they read to her.

If they paused a moment, she said imperiously, "Go on;" and whenever they stole a glance at the bed, hoping their task was over, the large grey eyes were wide open and apparently attentive.

On the morning after the funeral, the Princess sent a letter to Cordelia. The letter was returned. The lady was gone. No address was given to the messenger, for such had been Cordelia's orders. She was startled at this. The struggle within herself had been great, and in

proportion to this was the recoil at being baulked. There was a superstitious fear mingled with the disappointment. She had made a promise to the dead, and till it was fulfilled, a base terror was in her heart.

While she sat thinking of her next move in the game she had hitherto played so daringly, but where she was so unexpectedly checked, Sir Arthur was announced. He had been laid up for several days, and was evidently still suffering from the irritability of disease, if not from disease itself.

"What is the matter, Sir Arthur?"

"That fool—excuse me Princess—but, instead of acting with the commonest decorum in an affair of this kind, my precious nephew takes himself off on the pretext of running after Ivy, stops half-way at a place called Beechford, and has remained there since last Tuesday afternoon. He writes to me for his letters, and tells me he shall be back in a day or two, but without vouchsafing the slightest explanation of such an extraordinary proceeding. Nothing can be done—to-day is Saturday—no steps can be taken till he returns; he leaves me planté with lawyers and every species of trouble, and not an inch can I move till he returns."

"His wife is in England; perhaps she is with him."

"His wife!" Sir Arthur gave a start which pushed back his chair several paces.

"Did you not know it?"

"No. How the devil should I know it?" (This was an aside.)

"I am afraid, Sir Arthur, there has been some error."

"Madam!"

"Not error in the information I gave you, but error in your hastily applying it to Madame Clayre."

Never was old gentleman so confounded; and the matchless coolness of the informant did not diminish his rage. He was literally speechless.

"I can pledge myself for the truth of the letters from Florence; but as regards Milan and Lucerne, there must be some mistake as to the identity of the lady who left Milan with M. Corsand. I know now, that Mrs. Clayre was in England ten days after they left Milan, and was not, consequently, living at Lucerne."

"We must then concentrate our evidence up to the end of those ten days."

"You do not intend giving it up?"

"Why should I do so?"

The Princess looked more cordially at him than she had ever done before. This strong hate pleased her. Through it there was still a possibility of triumph. Those two might still be divided, no matter the rest. For a moment her heart beat at

the idea; but the promise to Liesa rose before her. "Serve her if you can." "I promise."

Vengeance would surely attend the violation of that promise. The revelation of her first marriage with Ivan Vassiloff might still tear to shreds her worldly fortunes; there yet existed, she knew, a proof of it, and a deadly spasm of superstitious fear told her that the discovery of this might be the form of Heaven's revenge for her perjury to the dead. No, she must be faithful to Liesa.

"To me, as you suppose, the matter does not present itself so forcibly; I have so many occupations, especially just now, when I am preparing for my journey to the Holy Land."

"To the Holy Land!"

"Yes. I am going to found a Convent there; it is much wanted by our order, and I have some surplus funds this year to devote to it; but, as I was saying, I would advise you, by our long friendship, to pause before you take any more steps in this affair. To draw public attention upon a misfortune which it may not be in the power of your laws to remedy, seems to me an imprudence."

"But the honour of our name."

"Bah, the misalliance was in itself disgrace enough, do not increase it."

But you took a different view at first, Princess."

"Possibly." His tenacity offended her, and she drew herself up as she continued:

"Circumstances modify the opinions or views of all but fools, and I pretend to wisdom, you know, Sir Arthur." She smiled very graciously, and, offering him her hand, terminated the interview.

When Sir Arthur reached his own house, he found Mrs. Watson and her daughter waiting for him. He had written to Mrs. Watson, and asked her to call on him on her return to England. He knew very little of this lady, and hoped that her spoken communications might be more intelligible than her letters, but he felt certain that her testimony would be on his side. She might even be made use of as a witness.

"I am very glad to see you, Mrs. Watson; it is kind of you to have complied so soon with my request."

"Pray do not say a word. You say it is kind of me, fancying, no doubt, that we are in all the confusion of unpacking and settling ourselves; but I assure you we are such old travellers that we think nothing of that. Life is a state of perpetual bivouac with us, Sir Arthur, and a carpet-bag contains all our necessaries of life; in fact, we have learned, by long practice, how to combine the maximum of comfort with the minimum of accessories or impediments. By this means my

very limited income does not prevent my having seen everything that is to be seen in Europe. My daughter will tell you how she enjoys our mode of life."

At last there was a pause in the cataract. The young lady's lips opened to let out her invariable dissyllable, "Such fun:" and Sir Arthur breathlessly interposed,

"I wished to ask—"

"Where we were last? I will tell you. We were at Lucerne, the most picturesque, charming place; we knew every one. You will say that that might take away from the pleasure of exclusive society, but it was not so at all; we had a circle of intimates—persons of the best sort. There were the Frohsdorffs, the Sellas, the Corsands."

"Corsands?" Sir Arthur interposed peremptorily.

"Michel Corsand and his wife, quite a young woman, but the most elegant, interesting creature; and her husband, without exception, the most gentlemanly Frenchman I ever met with. You would have been charmed with them."

"One moment, I beg; of what country was the lady?"

"An Englishwoman, but she spoke French charmingly. Not surprising, you will say, for she has lived in Paris all her life. She was a Holmes, daughter of the Holmes you know, who was so

long Secretary of Legation at Paris; her husband's brother is the celebrated M. Corsand, who has done so much both politically and socially for France. He is a philosopher and philanthropist, and a . . . . . in short, a very celebrated man."

Sir Arthur's face fell. The web had been artfully constructed, but it was falling to pieces before his eyes.

The lady went on without a pause. "We did expect Princess Bifrons, my dearest friend, but at the last moment she disappointed us; her friends the Frohsdorffs had secured a lovely chateau for her, but it remained empty. She is the most charming person. We became acquainted with her first in Florence. She was the life of society there, and so kind to every one. You really ought to thank her for her kindness to our poor boy Norton. [Sir Arthur's feelings in being united with Mrs. Watson in relationship, and with 'that fool Norton,' may be imagined.] She was quite a mother to him after I left. It was a grief to me to leave him, but I had nearer ties, and was obliged to go."

"Can you tell me anything more of the singer, who was——"

"The Signora Corda? No; she disappeared, I believe, went to Milan, and lost her voice; after that you know a public singer is swamped. One

hears nothing more of her; and you will say, so much the better; it is frightful to think of the future of such beings, poor things."

"Did you know that Norton left her, or rather gave her three thousand pounds?"

"You don't say so? Well, poor young woman, I am glad of that. She had good manners and a pleasing face, and I really think was very well principled in her way."

"I thought that as Miss Ashton——"

"Oh! I remember there *was a* likeness, and it is just possible they are the same; but, as you say, it is no business of mine, and a manner which in a governess, a poke bonnet and brown veil, &c., might seem flighty, is quite excusable in an actress. There was no great harm in her."

"Are you aware, Mrs. Watson," said Sir Arthur, with protentous gravity, "that that person [there was no epithet sufficiently comprehensive to be used] is related by marriage to both of us?"

"To both of us!" the honour of such a connection fairly arrested her.

"She is my unfortunate nephew's wife, and such reports of her levity have reached my ears, that I am desirous of dissolving the marriage."

Mrs. Watson started. She was not a bad woman, and her absurdity of manner did not prevent a certain shrewdness and quickness of apprehension. She remembered that Gerard Clayre had

married against the wishes of his grandfather, and it floated across her mind that some of her letters had been made use of, as part groundwork of accusation against a helpless woman, whose principal offence, no doubt, was having been an obstacle to Sir Arthur's more ambitious views for his nephew. Miss Ashton, or Mrs. Clayre, had been somewhat forward and presuming, but she knew nothing of her which warranted such accusations as she saw Sir Arthur would make. As a woman and a mother, she felt for the young and beautiful creature who was persecuted by an unscrupulous and, as she supposed, powerful man.

"I hope, Sir Arthur, that nothing I have said about Miss Ashton has given you a prejudice against her; her interest in Norton can now be explained easily, and without any blame she may have been kind to him. We all know how soft he was, poor boy, and now it is all accounted for; I mean her rather extreme kindness to Norton (I did not know then her connection with him). There was, I am bound to confess, nothing in her conduct when with me which could justify the slightest suspicion against her. I must beg most distinctly to state this, and, if called upon, I would repeat it. Come, Clara, you will say I am rather quick, but a woman's character, my dear Sir Arthur, is too sacred a thing for idle words to blacken it."

"I hope you do not think a *good* woman's good name is in danger from me, my dear Mrs. Watson."

Whatever she thought, Mrs. Watson for once left a question without a reply. She seemed to think that comfortable and spacious library rather a dangerous abode, for she rosé and took leave of Sir Arthur, and returned to her "bivouac," resolved that her name should not be brought forward in this matter.

"Remember, Clara, you are never to open your lips about Miss Ashton while we are in England. You know nothing about her, and we must not be mixed up in any of Sir Arthur's schemes. Remember, you must never mention she was with us; it is a secret."

"A secret! what fun, mamma. But then her name is Mrs. Clayre."

"Yes, but remember."

"Yes, how nice."

Sir Arthur's gout was much worse that evening. The snow-heap of calumny was fast melting away. Mrs. Watson's modes of speech were not more perverse and antithetical than her disposition, and from her he saw he could expect nothing. The Princess had changed her mind; the caprices of a woman in her rank were proverbial, and she also had failed him. And yet *he* was convinced, so thoroughly had his wishes

biased his opinions, that Cordelia was guilty, and that Gerard was betrayed. But how to prove it? This was Sunday, and on Monday Messrs. Bruttall and Varnish would come to him for directions.

CHAPTER V.

CORDELIA sate at home on the day of Liesa's funeral, with a heavy foreboding at her heart. Liesa had died on Monday and had been buried on Thursday. She was beginning to realize the fact that Gerard was in London, and the coincidence of his return with the presence of the Princess. To Cordelia's bruised spirit, there was enough in this to wound and irritate, and, above all, to alarm. Had this been arranged between them in Florence? She checked herself as her thoughts dwelt on this. Alas! it availed not; the glass was broken, and it mattered little whether in one or a hundred fragments. No additional blow could make its ruin more complete.

Never had she felt with such hopeless grief her loneliness. A London lodging has a peculiar power of impressing that fact upon its occupant, and regret for Liesa was added to this feeling. Loss, as well as isolation, was written in legible characters around.

She compared her present with her past. She counted up the gifts she had held; what had she

done with them? Where had they carried her? Was this the life she had anticipated with such proud and buoyant hope? Thus, dejected and careworn, without the power to repress her tears, yet almost too hopeless to shed them, she sat in her little room, when she was startled by a violent ring at the bell. A telegram was brought her. It was from the Ferry. "Mr. Ashley was in great danger. Mrs. Clayre must come at once."

"Was I waiting for this?" said Cordelia to herself, as, white as a sheet, she rose and tottered to her room.

In a few minutes she was ready. A cab was sent for, and she was far, far on her way home within two hours after she had received the message.

At the very moment she passed the Beechford station, listening mechanically to the details of the accident, a very few steps would have brought her face to face with Gerard Clayre and Maurice Corsand, and cleared away some of the clouds which encompassed her; but it was not to be; the bolt was to fall and crush her to the earth before the storm could disperse. Fast and far was she borne to meet it.

At the Wroxton station she found the chaise and Snip. She would not, could not trust herself to speak to him. She sate with feverish anxiety, trying to control her nerves, her voice,

her beating heart, till she arrived; and praying, or rather not praying—how can one form a prayer at such moments?—but calling wordlessly on God; crying, with an exceeding bitter cry, that name which, in joy and sorrow, comes to our lips as the supreme, the infinite appeal: not for life, not for death, not to change the unchangeable, not to alter the immutable, but as the utterance which is the ultimate expression of our weakness and of His power,—God!

When they reached the little gate, Snip jumped down.

"If you please, Miss—Ma'am, I must not go farther. There must be no noise."

Cordelia got out, and flew along the gravel road. At the porch stood a figure.

"My child! Thank God!"

"Mother!" Mrs. Ashley felt Cordelia would have slipped through her arms. She held her up, but she saw she had fainted.

When Cordelia opened her eyes, she saw Ivy's face bending over her.

"Oh, Ivy!" and then she remembered; "but Sarah!"

"Here I am, Cordelia," said Sarah, timidly; and the two sisters kissed each other as certainly never since the days of childhood they had done. Forgiveness asked and given was in that embrace.

"How is he?" said Cordelia, holding her tight.

"There has been no change since we sent for you; we thought then that he was sinking fast. Oh, Cordelia! can you forgive me? but for me you would have been here all the while."

Cordelia kissed her. "It is all over. *I* was wrong. But where is Ivy? and how is it she is here?"

"She has been here some time with little Annie Clayre, who had been ill."

"But may I not see him? Dare I go——"

"Yes; he never opens his eyes; he will not know you are here. Come."

Cordelia went up to the bed, and dropped on her knees beside it.

There lay her father, so pale, shrunk, and aged, that she could not have recognised the once stalwart form and massive features.

He breathed heavily, and his eyes were closed.

She looked at her mother. Grief and watching and fatigue could not mar the gentle serenity of Mrs. Ashley's face; but she was pale as death, and the hand which she placed on Cordelia's with a hushing motion was thin and burning.

Mr. Ashley moved, and murmured some inarticulate sound, in which the name of Ellinor could be distinguished.

His wife gave him a teaspoonful of some medicine, and then all was quiet.

After a time Mrs. Ashley made Sarah take Cordelia down stairs; she saw she was scarcely able to bear this shock—that she must have some rest before she could take her turn with the others in watching.

In the dining-room Ivy came to Cordelia. She felt like a guilty creature, for she saw by Cordelia's face that as yet no step had been taken by Gerard. That the blow had not fallen, but was impending.

"My darling, how glad I am to find you here," said Cordelia, her long-repressed tenderness welling up towards Ivy.

"Is it not strange, to be here when you left and when you return?"

Cordelia shuddered. "What an interval between, Ivy!"

"Have you been ill?"

"Not lately; but do not let me talk about myself. What is the cause of this sudden illness of my father?"

"A shock, I believe," stammered Ivy.

"How?"

A grey shade passed over Ivy's face, but she was silent.

"Cordelia," said Sarah, who had been busy getting some refreshment for her sister, "take this, and do not talk till afterwards."

Cordelia obeyed her. There was something very touching to her to be waited upon and attended to by Sarah. Sarah looked older, plainer, than she did, but the bitterness was gone from her voice, and the acidity from her smile.

Ivy sank back on a chair, thankful for the delay, and after a while left the room.

Sarah was not sorry. She controlled herself more than she did formerly, and she had such a perennial fountain of joy at heart in her consciousness that her lover was true to her, that her whole character was sweetened by it; but still there was sufficient of the old burden to make her anxious, in her new interest for Cordelia, to be the first with her.

Cordelia was herself somewhat shy of Ivy. She was afraid of the young girl, for she knew she had been guided by passionate and vindictive feeling in her last interview with Gerard; and Ivy's calm sweetness was so antagonistic to such faults, that Cordelia dreaded her questions. On her side, Ivy breathed more freely away from her sister; she felt like a person who sees another passing beneath a crumbling avalanche. She was afraid to speak, lest her very breath might disturb the equilibrium of the mass, and necessitate its fall.

This night Cordelia was to share the watch

with her mother. Sarah was to go to bed. Both sisters tried in vain to persuade their mother to rest, and let them sit up with Mr. Ashley. Delicate-looking as Mrs. Ashley seemed, and, in fact, was, her love for her husband was the mainspring of her life, and seemed to give her untiring strength. She scarcely moved from his bedside, and never changed her attitude of patient watchfulness. She was so meek and still in all her words and movements, that no one, not even her own children perhaps, guessed what she endured as the long hours had passed, and brought no change. But there was a world of consolation in the fact that Cordelia was with them, and this had given her fresh strength to bear the trial before her. During the next twenty-four hours it was certainly Ivy who suffered the most. She strove to appear calm, but her legs shook under her as she walked, her lips were white when she spoke, and there were moments when a step in the garden or the opening of the door made her tremble from head to foot. M. Corsand was in England; he would make it all well, she knew, but he came not. She had sent to Gerard some of M. Corsand's letters, indisputable proofs that all the scandal about Lucerne was a fabrication, but he took no notice of them.

For her the suspense was fearful.

With the other two, Sarah and her mother, Mr. Ashley's illness merged all other dread.

They watched together the lips which could not move, and the eyes which were open, but could not see. Their words of endearment could not penetrate to him, and he was locked away from them in a living death, mysterious and inaccessible as death itself.

When Ivy went to her own room, she remembered how many dreams she had there indulged of reconciling Gerard and Cordelia; and now the recollection of those dreams returned to her with a pang which made her shrink as from a physical blow. No ghost of the past rises before us with such a bitter mockery as that of an unfulfilled hope.

After she had undressed, she wrote to Gerard, and told him that Cordelia had been sent for, and was at the Ferry. She had been in London since April.

When she had written her letter, she resolved to give it to Susie to post the first thing in the morning. No bells were ever rung at the Ferry now, so she quietly opened the door and walked along the passages to the back stairs, which led to the servants' dormitories.

She stepped gently up to Susan's. The door was ajar, and a light was in it. Ivy's step was so soft that Susie, who seemed absorbed in some

occupation at the table, did not hear her. Ivy went in, and could not help smiling at what she saw.

Susie was seated on her heels before a low chair, on which were some very dirty cards in a certain arrangement. Susie was in her night-dress, rather too small at the arms, and too short for her. She looked like an overgrown baby as she sat there, with her light hair tucked behind her ears, and her round eyes fixed on the cards. Her mouth was open, showing the point of the tongue, as it followed the evolutions she made with the cards, much in the same way as a child, in writing, makes it follow the letters he is laboriously forming.

"Susan," said Ivy, putting her hand on her shoulder.

Susan would have given a scream, but Ivy put her hand to her mouth. She started to her feet, and then, in consideration of her costume, sank down again.

"Lor, Miss, you does frighten one, sure. Did you ring?"

"What are you doing, Susie?"

Susan blushed crimson, and hesitated.

"Never mind, tell me."

Susie shuffled up the cards, and hung her head.

"Telling my fortune, Miss; it is so dismal and

dreary, nobody does anything but cry; and then I do feel so anxious about—about Carlo"—she gave a little sob—"he has not writ for so long, Miss; I think something's going to happen; and then master's lying so ill; but there's no death in them cards, only a great surprise, please Miss. He told me he was lame, Miss, and had lost an arm, and I never hears since."

"I only came up to give you this letter, Susie; it must be posted to-morrow."

"Yes, Miss. Shall I light you? I will slip on my gownd in a minute."

"No; but you had better go to bed. I think, Susie, your own good sense must tell you what nonsense all this is."

Susie smiled. "It may seem nonsense to you, Miss; but to us poor girls there's a deal to be learnt from them cards."

"I am surprised at you, Susie. I must say I thought you knew better."

"So I does at times, Miss; but it's weary work waiting; and though, if you put me on my oath, ma'am, I can't swear as to believing it, it gives me a bit of comfort at the minute."

"Would it not be better comfort, Susie, to believe that whatever happens will happen by the will of One who permits no one to be tried more than they can bear, and who

will make all things work together for good for you?"

"Yes, Miss," said Susie, with a demure face and a gulp.

"Think of this, will you, Susie? I try to think so myself. We should all bear sorrow better if we did."

"To be sure I will, Miss."

"Good night. I advise you to lock up the cards."

"Yes, Miss."

CHAPTER VI.

WHEN Ivy returned to her room and got into bed, she was surprised to find two little arms put round her neck, and Annie nestling to her said, "Dear Ivy, is Mr. Ashley worse?"

"No; why?"

"I have heard so much crying, and then that lady was sent for. Is she Gerard's wife?"

"Yes, Annie; now go to sleep; I am very tired." A grown-up person always orders a child to sleep, as if sleep was quite a matter of volition. Poor Annie remained quiet, but after a very deep sigh from Annie she could keep still no longer, and said:

"Which is naughty, Ivy, Gerard or his wife?"

"Why do you ask?"

"I heard you say, as you cried one day, 'Oh, Gerard, Gerard,' and he does not come, although you are here and his wife too; and I have often heard Mamma say——"

"Never mind, Annie," answered Ivy, quite overwhelmed by this multiplicity of reasons; and then she paused. The child was so intelligent that

she knew she couldn't prevent her observing and learning much, which, if not properly explained, might be the fertile source of further misapprehension and error, so she resolved to explain as far as she could.

"Sometimes, Annie, grown-up men and women differ in opinion and disagree, but it is not fair to blame only one when perhaps both are wrong. Gerard and his wife have disagreed and are not friends now, though I hope they will be soon."

"Will Gerard come here?"

Ivy's head gave a bound.—Oh! if they could but meet—"I do not know," she said aloud.

Annie's arms were round Ivy's neck, and she had felt how her heart had throbbed at the bare idea, and she took her own measure of the circumstances from this sign; but she said no more, and gradually dropped asleep.

The next morning Mr. Ashley was not worse. Mrs. Ashley thought he had once opened his eyes and fixed them on Cordelia, but it was difficult to be sure of this.

Ivy went in and out of the room bowed to the ground with her heavy secret, trembling at every unwonted sound, fearing to leave Cordelia for a moment, yet fearing to stay with her, lest she should read her secret in her face. Ivy afterwards acknowledged that this was the most miserable, if not the most anxious, day of her life.

Cordelia never left her father the whole of that night and morning. There was a strange pathos of thanksgiving on her lips as she waited on him and watched the faint evidence of improvement, to be inferred from the fact of his increased quietness, and the manner in which he looked, with eyes that evidently had sight in them, on the strip of sunshine which entered in through the half-open shutter. It was so sweet to be of use to him, the past all blotted out, the present an act of ministering duty on her part.

Mrs. Ashley, with the tears rising in her eyes and gently rolling down her cheeks, saw how unconscious Cordelia was of the cause of the terrible shock, and how precious to her were these moments of fatigue and exertion, but of filial service. The poor man was pleased with her presence. Memory had not returned, but the instinctive delight he had always expressed at the touch of her hand, the softness of her voice, seemed to be roused once more. Once the poor stiffened lips murmured, "I am glad Ellinor sent you back."

When Mr. Frampton came the first thing in the morning, he pronounced his patient positively better. Again, when he returned in the afternoon, he confirmed this hope.

It was no longer the sad phrase—"Not worse." It was "Better—decidedly better."

"Cordelia, you must rest now; it is five o'clock. Have a cup of tea and go to bed for a few hours."

Cordelia obeyed. She kissed her mother tenderly and left the room.

Before going to her own room she resolved to write a few letters, and turned into the morning sitting-room, where she knew there were always writing materials, for her father used it as a study.

She drew the writing-book to her and wrote. As she did so her thoughts wandered from her employment to realise the change which twenty-four hours had made in her surroundings.

She was no longer the solitary, banished Cordelia. This was home. Oh, how full life was when the affections filled it! How empty if these were wanting, whatever other gifts were there! At that moment her mother entered. She, as well as Ivy, had a fear at her heart whenever Cordelia was not before her eyes. She saw her writing quietly, and would have slipped out of the room, had not Cordelia raised her head and, seeing who it was, gone up to her and kissed her soft, pale cheek.

"Oh, mother, how could I have left you for so long?"

"Would to Heaven you never had; but, whatever happens, remember, Cordelia, your place is

here; never distrust your home, my child, remember your place is here."

An undefinable fear smote Cordelia to the heart. She looked into her mother's eyes, but in those soft orbs she could read nothing but love. What impending shadow chilled her blood in her veins?

The fond mother kissed her, and seeing that all was quiet returned to her post. Cordelia stood motionless for a moment, and then, as if in need of air, opened the window. She returned to her writing, and then rose to find some fresh paper. In doing so she searched the writing-book, and there fell from its leaves a letter, addressed to her, in her father's hand.

She took it with surprise, and opened it.

Five minutes afterwards there might have been heard a heavy fall in the room, but, though Mrs. Ashley heard it, she never for a moment connected it with Cordelia. Sarah was with her, but neither of them imagined it could be anything but the fall of something in the lower part of the house.

They both sat watching the closed eyes of Mr. Ashley. Ivy had taken Annie for a walk.

Some time passed; Annie and Ivy returned. Annie, happy child, was soon lost to all the wrong and woes around in a fairy tale, and sat

curled up in the window of the dining-room reading with absorbed attention.

Ivy slipped into Mr. Ashley's room, "Where is Cordelia?" she asked at last.

"She has been writing letters, but I hope she is lying down now."

Mr. Ashley's eyes opened and his lips moved. They listened, and fancied he called her name.

"Shall I call her?" said Ivy.

"If she is asleep do not disturb her."

Ivy went into Cordelia's room, but it was empty. She then entered the morning-room gently, thinking she might be resting on the sofa.

The wind blew cold and sharp as she opened the door, but the room seemed untenanted. She looked around mechanically; there, beside the table, lay a heap of something on the floor which scarcely looked like a human form, but it was the one she sought.

It was Cordelia! Cordelia, with the letter clinched in her hands, cold and senseless, and as surely felled to the earth by its cruel words as if a bullet had struck her to the heart.

Poor Ivy! she fell on her knees beside her. She tried to raise her head on her knees and chafe her hands as well as her own tears would allow.

The blow had fallen then!

CHAPTER VII.

"PRESSURE on the brain, caused by some mental shock," said Mr. Frampton, after he had opened a vien, and a few dark drops had followed the lancet.

Cordelia had been laid on her bed, and, as no restoratives applied by either Ivy or Sarah had produced any effect, Mr. Frampton had been sent for.

A slight shiver on the eyelids and mouth showed that some feeling had been restored; but it was no more.

Hero "done to death by slanderous tongues" could not have worn a more deathlike aspect.

She was still as a carved image.

Mrs. Ashley was obliged to return to her husband. Sarah was with him while her mother had been with Cordelia, and both went to pass the night with him, while Ivy was left with Cordelia.

The curtains were drawn, and the room was dark. The night-light was on the table, and gave a flickering light. Cordelia's white face could

not be distinguished from the pillow. It was eleven o'clock. Susie was to have a mattress in the next room, in case Ivy required her assistance.

The silence within the room was intense, but without, the wind was blowing loud from the sea, sometimes in furious gusts, sometimes in low, wailing sighs. The windows, fastened as they were, shook every now and then; now as if some one was violently forcing an entrance, and again as if fine fingers were running down the panes, seeking some opening.

About five o'clock, as Ivy listened, she fancied she heard a step, not as of some one walking, but as if some one was standing beneath the window, and had moved closer under the balcony for shelter.

She must have fancied it. Her faculties were so strained with listening, that she thought at the same time that a low sigh stirred Cordelia's lips; but that was impossible. Again a tempestuous blast whirled round the house, and the trees on the lawn cracked and groaned beneath it like the timbers of a ship in a heavy gale; and again Ivy heard a step.

By an involuntary movement she stooped over Cordelia, and this time distinctly heard a sigh, but the next moment all was in the same marble immobility as before.

When the time came for administering some cordial which Mr. Frampton had prescribed, Ivy felt that the teeth opened with less difficulty for the insertion of the spoon.

Towards morning the storm ceased. At six o'clock Ivy drew the curtains, and half opened the shutters. There were signs of the fury of the elements in the broken branches that strewed the ground, but the storm was all over, and a warm, moist haze of morning sunshine glittered on the whole earth.

She returned to the bed, and looking at Cordelia, on whose face the light now fell, she saw her eyelids quiver, and one or two large tears rolling down her cheek, as her eyes half opened and recognised Ivy. How violently Ivy's heart beat at the sight of those tears. She felt they were a sign of returning consciousness, and she dreaded the rebound of the blow. She went immediately to Mrs. Ashley and Sarah.

They decided at once upon sending for Mr. Frampton, and then Ivy, having told Susie to go to Cordelia, went to her own room. She wanted to be alone, to have a *good* cry, as women term it. It was only six o'clock, yet she found, to her surprise, Annie up and dressed.

"So early, Annie?"

"Is Cordelia worse?"

"No; she is better, I think, and we have

sent for Mr. Frampton. Where are you going, dear?"

"Only to the garden."

Ivy kissed her, and the child ran down stairs. Ivy smoothed her hair, and washed her hands, and then knelt down for a few minutes' heartfelt prayer, before she returned to her post. She had told Susie to go to Cordelia's room, and did not therefore hurry back immediately; but Susie had been delayed, and Cordelia was alone.

As soon as Ivy had left the room (Cordelia's half-opened eyes had followed her to the door), she moaned slightly, as if vaguely trying to measure her strength. Then, with an effort, she sat up in the bed, and putting back her hair, leant her cheek upon her hand, and sought to recall the events of the last few hours. All gradually returned to her, and a dark and desperate expression replaced the faint languor of exhaustion. She got out of bed, supporting herself as she did so, and found she could stand, though she tottered and trembled from head to foot. She saw on the table some wine, which had been brought the night before for Ivy, and drank it; and, thus supplied with a little factitious strength, she dressed herself, and softly opening the door of her room, went towards her father's. It was open, and she stood outside. It was still early, for the night-light was burning

on the mantel-shelf, but a ray of light through a clink of the shutter fell on the old man's face. It was very pale and worn, but there was a great peace on it. She could not see her mother's face, but the thin white hand was on the counterpane.

Like a spirit barred out from some Eden, Cordelia stood on the threshold, while a host of fond yearnings and loving memories thronged on her mind, to be banished as by a flaming sword, by the one terrible fact,—"My father has cursed me!" She turned away, and went down stairs; but as her step was lingering, in a moment's pause in the hall, Ivy, who had finished dressing, came out of her room, heard some faint sound, looked down and saw her.

"Cordelia!" she was at her side in a moment, and with her arms round her.

"Where are you going?"

Cordelia looked at her, but did not speak; she only tried to go on, but the path was barred by Ivy.

"My dearest, you must not leave us. Stay, Cordelia, you are not yourself."

"Let me pass," said Cordelia.

"Cordelia, you once loved me—I beseech you —I kneel to you—wait—be patient a little while, my dearest, only a little while."

"Patient!" It would be impossible to describe the mechanical manner in which Cordelia uttered

these words or the blank stare of her eyes. This sorrow did not ask patience; it seemed to have gone so deep into the depths of life, as to pass its limits and to enforce death.

"Mr. Ashley has been deceived; only wait, Cordelia."

Cordelia turned away. Her white lips muttered something, and Ivy caught the words—"My father has cursed me, and it has killed him."

"Cordelia," repeated Ivy, with passionate and eager imploring, "I will not leave you—if you go, I go; wherever you wish to be, there will I be also—you cannot send me away from you—you cannot cast me off. We are sisters—but pause. Mr. Ashley has been deceived; he will discover his error, and then who will be able to comfort him but you? Again, dearest, for Mrs. Ashley's sake, whatever happens, you are the only one who will be able to soothe and support her."

"I? when my father has cursed me, and it has killed him." Cordelia could not get beyond the circle of torture into which those words bound her; but her face was getting paler and paler every minute, as the flickering strength left her.

"M. Corsand is here—in England—all will be made right; hear me."

Cordelia stared blankly at her. Even that name had no charm for her. It brought no

prophecy of deliverance with it. "I will go with you then," said Ivy; and she took Cordelia's hand in hers, and they moved on side by side to the threshold. But before they reached it, it was pushed aside hastily by some one who ran in, and who rushed up to Ivy.

It was Annie.

"Oh, Ivy, I could not help it. I told him he must not come. I kept him as long as I could; but he would, he would."

She burst into tears, and clung half in passion, half in grief, to Ivy.

Behind her stood Gerard!

Ivy gave a cry of terror.

Cordelia stood still, with her eyes fixed on her husband, and explored his face with a piercing and inquiring look.

"Cordelia, can you forgive me?" he was going on, but at his voice in that beseeching tone the tension of nerve which had supported her till then gave way. She threw up her arms with a wild cry—"Save me, Gerard!" and then, snapt as a reed by a sudden tempest, fell speechless at his feet.

Gerard raised her in his arms, and obeyed, with a directness which looked like mechanism, Ivy's guiding look.

Cordelia was carried up stairs, and laid again on her bed.

"Mr. Frampton will be here directly—you must go, Gerard."

She took his hand, and led him as she would a little child to the door of the room.

"Ivy, I will not leave her." Gerard's voice was harsh and abrupt, but he made no resistance to her touch. He only stood as rooted to the threshold.

At that moment Mr. Frampton, followed by Mrs. Ashley, entered the passage.

"Good God! Mr. Clayre," was all Mrs. Ashley could say.

"I will not leave her," repeated Gerard, "I have killed her."

In the surprise of the moment, Mr. Frampton had put his back to the door, but when he saw the face of the man who stood before him, he gave way. With almost an awe-struck look, he stepped back. "Be composed" he said, "she is still alive. Go in, sir, you can do more for her than I can; but remember, her reason is at stake. Take care how you agitate or startle her; if she recognises you all will be well—a counter shock in these cases is the only effectual remedy. But for pity's sake take your cue from her; if she does not know where she is, and does not remember the circumstances, do not recall them." He stepped aside, and Gerard entered the room.

When the door closed behind him, he paused for a minute and shaded his eyes with his hand. He was dazzled by the darkness and his own dimmed vision. He stepped up to the bed, and fell on his knees beside Cordelia.

Her eyelids quivered, and as if roused by that voice, her eyes opened with a vague, wandering, questioning glance. But they had found what they had sought, "Gerard, at last."

He did not dare to say forgive me, but drew her nearer to him, and folded his arm round her.

"Save me, Gerard!" Her eyes opened wide and eagerly, and she nestled to him as a bird, who, after a long, dreary flight, has found her mate and her nest.

Gerard kissed her brow, her eyes, her lips; he did not speak, but these wordless caresses told all.

No recrimination—no explanation—no proud claim for reconciliation or forgiveness. Two hearts which had been divided so long, now beat close together. What need of more? The passionate affection of both asserted itself—each knew the love which lived in the other.

And we make ourselves so unhappy with our hatreds and resentments; and we plan such logical and clear elucidations, such magnanimous and well-reasoned pardons; and when the hour comes, silence is the most eloquent advocate, and the

child-like faith that all is forgotten and forgiven the only true seal and consecration of our peace. Gradually Cordelia's eyes closed, as with invincible weakness.

Mr. Frampton now entered, and saw her thus—her husband's arms round her as he still knelt by the bed. "This is better than I dared to hope," he said. "She is safe. I must now go to my other patient."

Ivy stepped in timidly as Mr. Frampton left the room.

The brother and sister did not speak, but the look exchanged between them required no interpretation.

For hours the wave of life seemed ebbing to and fro with Cordelia; there was a death-like faintness, and then a burning fever, which fluctuated back into icy coldness; but there were forces at work now, which upheld the all but vanquished powers of life.

With many sobs and blushes, Annie had told Ivy that that morning she had slipped out into the garden, and had seen Gerard standing near the house. She entreated him not to go in, for "Ivy," she said, "was miserable; Mr. Ashley, very, very ill; Cordelia, worst of all."

"He looked as if I had given him a blow," she continued, "but I told him that I had heard that

Mr. Frampton had said the least noise would kill Cordelia, and I promised him, if he would only go back, I would tell him the first thing after Mr. Frampton came. I showed him Cordelia's windows, all shut up. He said he would go, but he never moved, and then he seemed to hear something and would not listen to me, but opened the door."

Gerard remained rooted to the bedside. Cordelia never moved, but slept or opened her eyes in the same attitude.

She was like one who has staggered and fallen under a heavy weight—it is removed, but it is impossible yet to rise. There is a voluptuous enjoyment in lying prostrate, though no longer crushed. She was reduced to almost infantine weakness, but there was also an infant's unconscious floating back into life, in the way she quietly lay with closed eyes and regular breath, and fingers locked in those of Gerard. Reduced thus to its simplest elements, love and trust, life was happiness in the sense it is to a child, in the perfection it is to an angel.

If we count our golden moments, we shall find that, though many a keen and bright enjoyment has been won by success, in whatever path we have chosen to tread, none have passed by with such intense and full-filling joy as these sabbaths of the heart; and, thank God, they can come to

all—the triumphant and the defeated—with a like sweetness, and as entire fruition.

As in dreams, one does not stop to argue upon the possibility of circumstances, but one accepts them with all their incoherence, Cordelia did not seem surprised that her husband should be with her. He was the only palpable reality in the world of shadows around, and she clung to him with a proportionate tenacity.

So the hours passed.

Once, as she lay quiet and apparently asleep, Ivy, who came in occasionally to see them, whispered to Gerard—

"Are you not happy, dearest?"

"It is not happiness yet. I am overwhelmed, but I scarcely know what I feel. If she were to die——"

"Oh, do not say that—it was a terrible shock, but she is getting over it as fast as we could wish."

"How was it?"

"Mr. Ashley had written to her a dreadful letter; we none of us knew it. He must have written it after he had answered Sir Arthur, and just before he was taken ill. She found it, and must have read it."

"My God! How we have all wronged her, from first to last."

Gerard leaned his head on his hands.

"There are some things I cannot yet explain, but I have learned enough from her own statements——"

"When?"

"A book—a diary of hers—did you send it? I learned from it how blindly, how grossly I was deceived from the first. To think that we have both suffered—so vainly and so idly——"

Gerard was interrupted by a sigh from Cordelia, and he was instantly bending over her.

Some of his words had reached her. "Save me," she said, imploringly. Those were the words Ivy had used in London when he had so harshly rejected her prayer. There was something so ineffably pathetic in Cordelia's voice, and in this remembrance, that, strong man as he was, he burst into tears as he buried his face in her pillow.

Cordelia turned round, and her weak hands tried to move his. "What have I done?" she murmured; and she sought to soothe him as a feeble mother might seek to soothe a child. But he recovered himself with an effort, and then she smiled with a timid smile which smote him to the heart. It was the smile of one who has suffered too long to smile yet without fear.

They were left almost entirely alone.

Ivy came in occasionally, but neither Mrs. Ashley nor Sarah would jar with their presence,

and all the memories it would bring, the calm peace of that chamber in which life was slowly assuming the mastery over death.

And so the day passed, and the night. And that day and this night were the first of the new Heaven and the new Earth which had been called out of darkness for those two.

And so ended the Saturday which Gerard had fixed for his duel with M. Corsand.

CHAPTER VIII.

TWO days had made a great progress in Mr. Ashley's condition. From the day Cordelia had arrived, his illness seemed to have diminished. The night she had watched him there had been a change, and no relapse had taken place, although for two nights and a day he had not seen her. On this Sunday morning (the morning after Gerard's arrival) he spoke almost distinctly, and with something of his old roughness, to his wife. He had evidently forgotten what had caused his illness.

"I am really better," he said, "and I shall get up. What a time it is since I have been like a log on this bed, and what a burden to you, old lady!"

"Mr. Frampton will be here in half-an-hour."

"Hang Frampton! I shall do as I tell you. If I were to be much longer here, I know *who* would need Frampton." With genuine and grateful affection, Mr. Ashley kissed the soft cheek of his wife.

"Shall I help you, my dear?"

Mrs. Ashley was very anxious about this uprising of her husband. She did not like to recall a subject fraught with so much danger to him.

There was nothing however for it but to obey. She had not learned the art of contradicting her husband; so Mr. Ashley was helped out of bed, dressed, and with the support of her arm and dragging his left leg helplessly, he moved to an easy chair by the window.

"How long have I been ill?" he asked.

"Almost a week."

"A week only! It is wonderful how long and how blank a time it seems; and yet I have a confused recollection of some things—a shock——"

"Do not try yourself by thinking about it now. Thank God your illness is past——"

"Humph!"

Mr. Ashley looked at the flush which was spread over his wife's face, and a tone in her trembling voice gave him a suspicion that something connected with Cordelia had occurred, but it was all vague and dim as yet.

"How the trees have been broken by the storm last night!"

"Did you hear it?"

"Something I heard. Those branches must be cleared, they are very unsightly."

"Very."

"I wonder you did not think of it before; but one can tell I have not been about. Hillo—who is that?"

"Annie Clayre."

"The granddaughter of that——"

"Ivy brought her." Mrs. Ashley hastened to bring out the name of Ivy, as an anodyne to the irritation which she could see was produced by the name Clayre.

"I remember," he said, and remained lost in thought. It is no exaggeration to say that Mrs. Ashley trembled from head to foot.

At last he looked up.

"What on earth are you standing for? you look as if you were mounting guard over a lunatic. There, sit down—not behind me—I like to see the person I am talking with."

"Here is Mr. Frampton." How Mrs. Ashley welcomed him! She did not wish to conceal anything from her husband, but she did not know, without consulting Mr. Frampton, how much he could bear.

She left them together, and went to see Cordelia. Cordelia was sitting up in her bed, propped by pillows. She looked white and faint, but when she saw her mother, she smiled and moved her face towards her.

"You are better, darling; she is better," she said, turning to Gerard.

"I think so."

"Thank God!" and Mrs. Ashley sank down on the chair which Ivy had placed for her.

Cordelia looked at her anxiously, and slid her hand into Gerard's.

"I hope Mr. Ashley is better."

"Yes, much better; if all goes on well, he may be pronounced quite out of danger."

"Hush," whispered Gerard. He saw a faint ripple of colour like a reflection, rather than a flush, on Cordelia's face; and he was even more quick in his perception than her own mother.

"Take my place, Ivy, for a minute."

As they moved to the door, they both looked back, and saw a smile of gladness pass over Cordelia's face.

"Excuse me," said Gerard; "but a word, a look, may bring back all our fears, and I am as timid as a child."

He paused for a minute, and leaned against the wall.

"I am like a monomaniac," he said, "I have but one idea at this moment; but I know how much all in this house have suffered through me and mine; and you will see how anxious I am to make amends."

"It is a fearful position," said Mrs. Ashley. "How to explain it all to Mr. Ashley, I know not."

'I think the best way would be for me, if Mr.

Frampton sanctions it, to go at once to Mr. Ashley, and tell him under what a fearful misapprehension we have both been."

"But if he is *not* strong enough—if my husband should have a relapse;" and the slight stress which she laid on the word husband revealed to Gerard that—good and admirable mother as she was—her first care, thought, love, was for Mr. Ashley.

They were walking through the passage and met Sarah.

"Do you know who that is who has gone into my father's room?"

"Mr. Frampton."

"Oh no! *with* him? A gentleman and a lady (who is still waiting below) came together with Mr. Frampton, and stayed in the dining-room till he came down, and then both he and that gentleman have gone into my father's room. I was in my own room and did not see them."

They stood silent, and then Gerard, who had scarcely listened to Sarah, moved back again to Cordelia's room.

CHAPTER IX.

AFTER M. Corsand had left Gerard, subsequently to their stormy interview at Beechford, on Friday, he gave his servant orders to make preparations for their immediate departure; but to tell the landlord he retained the room, as he might return the next day.

M. Corsand, in spite of his outward calmness, had suffered much more than Gerard during their discussion. A subject had been approached, a grave trodden on, which to him were holy. There was perhaps only one human being towards whom M. Corsand was disposed to be severe, perhaps even unjust; and it was to serve *him*, Gerard Clayre, that he was about to lay bare the secret of his life, and admit profane witnesses into the sanctuary of his soul. But it was justice to Cordelia, and it must be done.

He sate lost in thought for a few minutes, and then, taking up the packet addressed to the Princess which Cordelia had sent him from Milan, he determined to take it to her. He felt convinced that her hand held a clue which could

also unravel some part of the coil of evil which had so long marred Cordelia's fate. At all events he would put it to the proof, and this packet would gain him admission to her presence, he knew. M. Corsand arrived in town late at night on Friday, and lost some time in finding her address. It was not till Saturday afternoon that he found her.

The Princess was sitting alone, when M. Corsand's card was put into her hand. Sir Arthur had only just left her. She was thinking how completely her schemes had failed.

Cordelia's presence in England at once disproved the greater part of the calumnies against her. The Princess attributed the failure, however, to Sir Arthur's coarse methods of action. Had the affair been left to her, their own wills would have separated them, far more effectually than any legal process. But Sir Arthur was a coarse man, and his devices were like himself. She felt at that moment that she despised him thoroughly. The mark had been overshot, and his devices had failed. The quick thought rose to her crafty designing nature, that even now she might perhaps succeed where her coadjutor had been defeated; but the thought of her promise to Liesa arrested her at once. This involuntary failure was not, however, the atonement the dead girl had sought at her hands. There must be

active service if she would fulfil that promise. And if not redeemed, what would be the penalty? She covered her face with her hands, as if she would shut out the remembrance of the poor pale face, and the vow it had extorted from her.

It was at this moment that a card was placed in her hand, and as she looked up to receive it, a gentleman advanced to her.

"M. Corsand!" she exclaimed, with surprise.

"I hope I find you disengaged for five minutes."

"Certainly." If there was one human being in the world the Princess had a mingled fear and respect for, it was M. Corsand. She would never have measured herself directly against *him*.

"Excuse my abruptness, but I have only a few minutes, and the cause of my intruding on you is an urgent one."

"Pray speak; our mutual occupations have so often indirectly brought us in contact, that I can scarcely feel we *are* strangers. The organised portion of the charities in which you take so great a part is sometimes brought very near ours, and M. Corsand's name has been often before me."

It was part of the Princess's usual tactics to lead a conversation, which she saw was about to touch some particular subject on which she had not prepared her line of defence and attack, as far

as possible from it. But she was not accustomed, in her dealings with men, to meet with a character like M. Corsand's.

"Thank you, I am the more encouraged then, as you do remember me, to speak openly. We were slightly acquainted at Naples two years ago, and it seemed to me then, that you possessed great influence over Mr. Clayre, and that to that influence might be attributed a very serious misunderstanding, which was afterwards the cause of his separation from his wife."

"Indeed!"

Such a sledge-hammer mode of attack could not be met with polished courtesies; she armed herself at once with her coldest and haughtiest manner.

"That some very serious error is the cause of all this suffering, I am convinced; for there was a strong and mutual attachment at the time of the marriage, and it still exists—"

"Well?"

"I ask you, therefore, Madam, in the name of one"—his voice here became much agitated—"who served you, and whom you professed to regard, to correct this error and remove this misapprehension."

The appeal was a direct and formidable one, and the grave loftiness of the manner imposed even on her. A voice now mute had spoken

almost the same words: "If you can, serve her."

"You are right; I was attached to Mrs. Vibert."

M. Corsand winced almost perceptibly.

"I wait your reply."

"You think—," she said, bending forward with a sarcastic smile, "that I can act the part of a good fairy to these perverse mortals."

"I think that you can explain the error which was the first cause of this sorrow."

"Why do you think so?"

"It was after Mr. Clayre's visit to you and your visit to Mrs. Clayre, on your return to Naples, that her determination to leave her husband was taken."

"And suppose I refuse interference in a matter which does not concern me in the least."

"It can scarcely be a matter that does not concern you, to repair a wrong you have inflicted."

"A wrong I have inflicted; your words are not measured."

"To you I attribute this wrong; how, by what proofs, I know not; but you must have tampered with both, and this is the end."

"But I repeat, why do you attribute this to me?"

"Simply from watching the manner in which you have acted since. You invited Cordelia, after her return to the Ferry, to visit you."

"Because——? What was my motive?" said the Princess, with inexpressible haughtiness.

"You wished to retain her under your influence; at Milan you traced her, but with no friendly intentions, as you well know; at Florence you again used your influence with Mr. Clayre against her; since then, you have made use of a very commonplace blunder as to name, to crown your work by impressing on him a belief in his wife's unworthiness, which would have led him publicly to disgrace her."

"Which would have led him?—has it not done so?"

"This error has been easily rectified, but the knowledge that such an impression has been taken by Mr. Clayre, may as effectually part his wife from him, as if the separation were a legal decree."

"Then," said the Princess, crossing her feet and leaning back on her chair, "if my motives have been such as you say, I have, it appears succeeded after all," and she looked up at him with triumph. But her look changed as she met his looking down upon her with a compassion which was more difficult to bear than downright condemnation.

"It depends on what you call success or failure. If you call it success indirectly to injure others, and directly to destroy the integrity of your own soul, it may be called so."

"But if the aim I proposed to myself was that those two should be separated, and I did separate them, is that not success?"

"*That* success or failure can never be yours. If those two persons are sufficiently faulty to be led into wrong by circumstances which you have arranged, they are the true workers of their own misery, and not you. The evil we receive from others is only effectual where the evil of our own nature meets it. But for that, it would be worthless. No human being has power irrevocably to injure any one but himself. There have been limits set by One more powerful than the poor human tools which He uses."

"You are too subtle for me; if I am so powerless, why do you appeal to me?"

"I believe with profound faith that wrong will always be made right, and I know that, without your laying a finger on it, this knot will be ultimately unravelled; but the opportunity for *you* to undo it, may never recur. It seems to me my duty to you—that duty which every human being owes to another, to save him, if he can, from persisting in wrong; and to appeal, when a fitting season offers itself, to his best feelings, thus to lead him to triumph over his worst. That is why I came to you. Choose!"

The dignity of that man's bearing was so great that it invested the simple words he used with a

force which startled for the moment the woman he addressed.

She rose to her feet as if some power not her own had lifted and placed her before the bar of a tribunal, and there was a passionate deprecation in her voice, though her words were defiant.

"Who are you, to speak thus to me? I must remember the name you invoked on entering, to hear you with patience."

Again M. Corsand shuddered, but his voice was unfaltering when he answered her.

"I do not ask this for the sake of any one but yourself."

"Then I refuse you. I will not undo what is done."

He looked at her searchingly. She shrank from that look. The evil passions within her had been roused to combat, and were resisting his influence with desperate energy.

"I have nothing left, then, but to take leave of you. Before I go, let me consign into your own hands a packet Mrs. Clayre forwarded to me from Milan. It is addressed to you."

He placed a packet in her hands, which she mechanically opened.

"It was given to Mrs. Clayre by a patient in the hospital of Milan—a youth of the name of Carlo, who had received it from a wounded man who died on the pallet next to him."

He bowed, and passed on to leave the room as she hastily opened it, but a low cry fell on his ear, and he turned round.

The Princess had fallen on her knees, with the scattered papers of the packet escaping from her hands.

"What is the matter? Are you ill?" She was livid.

He tried to raise her, but her limbs were rigid, and her lips were white, as she muttered, "I am free; neither the living nor the dead can harm me now, unless—" She paused.

"Have—you—read—these?" she gasped out.

"Read them! How could I read what was addressed to you?"

Again that profound compassion in look and tone. She fell lower and lower, crushed to the earth with the contending feelings which raged in her.

"Did *she* read them?"

"Who?"

"Mrs. Clayre."

"How can you ask such a thing?"

"You come here to ask me a favour . . . No matter," she said, impatiently replying to a gesture of his, "who the favour was for — for yourselves or for me; but it was a request. *She* suspects or knows that I have injured her, and you both hold the secret of my honour in your

hands. You could compel me to accede to your request by the most cogent menaces, and you let such a power fall from your hands—?"

Her voice dropped into a whisper of fear and doubt.

"Are you in earnest?"

He looked down upon her with the most profound pity.

"Is this strength or weakness?" she asked.

"What strength does evil bring with it? What weakness would be so abject as to sully one's own honour—for what? to do what God, in His own good time, will do to make the wrong right."

"I will tell you," she said, slowly rising to her feet, "this packet contains proofs—the only proofs—of my marriage with Ivan Vassiloff. I was sixteen—a child. He took advantage of my ignorance, of my weakness, and I married him secretly. Two months after my child's birth the whole was made known to my father. Vassiloff was knouted and sent to Siberia; and before I was twenty I married Prince Bifrons. He died two years after our marriage, and left me his enormous wealth. His will was disputed. Rumours had got abroad of my first marriage. We are all Roman Catholics in our family. Divorce is impossible. I knew not this certificate was in Vassiloff's possession. However, no proofs were brought against

me, and I took possession of the Bifrons estates, in right of the will. Still I knew that it was possible that Vassiloff might appear. He had escaped. Sometimes I traced him, and three times I was obliged to return to Russia at a moment's notice to watch for him. At last I heard that a private soldier, in one of the Hungarian regiments, had been heard to boast that he held the fortunes of the Princess Bifrons in his knapsack. Step by step I followed his career, till I heard he was in Italy, in the hospital at Milan. There—death freed me from him."

"And your child?"

"Liesa? She is dead." Her voice sank. "Poor Liesa! While my father was alive I dared not see her. She had been taken away at her birth. I only knew where she was at his death. He confessed she was alive, and told me where. I saw her; but how could I be a mother and have a mother's feelings in my position? What could I do? Had she been beautiful there might have been a possibility; but she was a plain, coarse-looking little peasant. Her one gift I cultivated. Had she lived she would have been the finest contralto in Europe. Watched on every side, I could only allow her a bare pittance —as a charity—otherwise my enemies would have discovered everything. I was resolved not to be defeated, and I kept my secret. Now I am fr[illegible]

with this I destroy every vestige of proof, and I defy them all."

In her heart was the wicked thought, "Heaven itself cannot now snatch my wealth from my grasp;" and she broke off the seals and tore the paper into strips. As she did so, a tiny, faded, golden curl fluttered down. It fell on the carpet at her feet.

She gave a cry, and fell on her knees beside it. Even to her—base, callous as she was—there was piercing pain at the sight. All the gold which the sacrifice of that little curl had purchased was, for one fleeting moment, not to be counted in the balance. For that one brief moment it was a mother's hand which smoothed the downy sheen of that baby lock, and pressed it to her lips; and a mother's heart which owned, that its gold outweighed all else. The instinct, alas! it was no more than an instinct—was transitory: but as she rose from her knees she had a graver, softer look than before.

"M. Corsand," she said, "I have told you my secret. I should have died had I not spoken. For twenty years this secret has burned in my heart, and I know with you I am safe. I have no regrets for Ivan Vassiloff; he was a handsome animal, and nothing more. I was sixteen. He did not love me, but it was, he thought, a fine card to hold, a secret marriage with his General's

daughter. His only good quality was a love for his child. My father had sent her to his estates with the strictest secrecy, but Ivan found who she was with, and twice I know he held communication with her foster parents. Hence this curl."

Again she fixed her eyes upon the poor tarnished lock of hair, and then went on—

"To Liesa, on her death-bed, I made a promise to serve Mrs. Clayre, and I will do it. I could do so best if I saw her. I could explain a mystery about a letter I gave her! I will go to that place, the Ferry; she is there, I know."

"If you can serve her, a word from you would be enough. Write to her."

"Excuse me, but I must be allowed my own way in this. I will go."

She rang the bell, and gave an order, and in a moment the servant returned with a Bradshaw.

M. Corsand rapidly turned over in his mind the advantages and disadvantages of accompanying her, and thought that, on the whole, it was best he should go with her. This woman, who had the lithe grace of the panther, had also its sudden treacheries and startling fiercenesses. He had best go.

"Will you come?" she said.

"I will."

She gave orders, and they drove to the Great Western, and set off immediately.

"Do you know that Mr. Ashley is ill, and—"

"*Ce pauvre homme;* but I will cure him. It is pleasant to think I can, by a word, restore happiness to a divided family. All emotions are pleasant in this sterile world."

There would have been something humorous had M. Corsand been in a mood to appreciate humour in the way the Princess took at once the attitude of the beneficent fairy of the household. The versatility with which she changed her "role" from foe to friend was marvellous, and the "pose" was not entirely a feigned one; she believed in it herself. Influence, power, on a larger or on a smaller scale; these were her idols, and amongst the many strange turns and folds of her complex character, was an immense facility in the assumption of any character she chose to adopt, and a love of making her life as dramatic as possible. She had been affected at the moment by M. Corsand's visit, and the sight of that tiny lock had recalled vividly her youth and its perished dream. Her brief moment of regret and suffering had been sincere, but now, with her usual versatility, she had turned her back on the past, and was bent upon investing herself with the magnanimous part of a good genius to the ungrateful Gerard Clayre. Under all her European refinements and accomplishments, the Asiatic barbarian, despotic, wilful, childish, and

intriguing, peeped out; and besides these, the ordinary attributes of her race, in her was a quickness, a keenness of perception which was wonderful, and individual. She saw at once that her part was all played out with Gerard. She was resolved to abdicate with grandeur.

At first sight the delicate elegance of her person did not give one the idea of the virile strength with which she could endure fatigue and brave danger. Those slight limbs were of steel, and no trace of exhaustion could have been discovered on the smooth brow after the hurried night journey. The crude light of an English morning fell on a delicate face, a round, low, and somewhat narrow, forehead, and wide, flexible lips, which had preserved their full and firm curves far longer than is usual with a feature which is always the first to show the wear and tear of time. M. Corsand watched her curiously. He knew her better than she thought he did, and she did not deceive him. It was almost ludicrous to see the triumphant manner in which after so much persevering enmity she arrogated to herself the right to bestow happiness. It was, perhaps, however, even more pitiful than ludicrous. The astute and worldly schemer had missed out of her calculations one element. She had left no margin for "the Divinity who shapes our ends, rough hew them as we will."

When they arrived at Wroxton, it was still too early to proceed to the Ferry, and they breakfasted and waited at the inn till ten o'clock, and then proceeded to the Ferry on Sunday morning.

When they arrived at the gate they alighted, and as they passed through overtook Mr. Frampton.

M. Corsand recognised him immediately.

"How is your patient?" he said.

"My patients?—better. Mrs. Clayre is quite out of danger."

"She *is* here, then," said the Princess significantly to M. Corsand.

"She was sent for when her father became so much worse. Mr. Clayre arrived yesterday."

"*Ce bon Clayre.* I must see him, if you please."

Mr. Frampton bowed to the imperious tone.

"You will excuse my first going to see Mr. Ashley."

"Certainly; but will you tell him," said M. Corsand, "that I wish to see him for five minutes."

"Your name?"

"That is immaterial. I am personally a stranger to him. But can he bear a surprise?"

"If not painful—yes."

"I cannot answer as to that."

They entered the house, and Mr. Frampton

ushered the strangers into the dining-room, while he ran up to Mr. Ashley.

"What a comfortable little room," said the Princess in an amiable tone, looking round as if she had been in the cottage of some peasant. "How you English make the best of your small spaces and low walls. There is nothing absolutely artistic in these drab curtains and square rooms, but how well your doors and windows are finished! There is an ideal of material comfort in all this, which is as refined in its way as art itself."

"In summer, that must be a lovely garden."

"That is so strange—in summer, *we* like open plains, mountains, forests; *we* like gardens in winter!"

"Under glass?"

"Precisely so—*jardins d'hiver*—are we not right?"

"As Russians, certainly."

Mr. Frampton returned and called M. Corsand. "You will pardon me, Princess," said the latter as he left her, "I will return as soon as possible."

Mr. Frampton looked back with awe at the word Princess.

"I have not yet seen Mrs. Clayre, but I am now going to her room, immediately." He felt half inclined to send Sarah down to do the

honours of the house, but there was something strange in the pertinacious way she kept asking to see Mr. Clayre which puzzled him, and he thought it most prudent not to do so.

M. Corsand went up-stairs directly into Mr. Ashley's room. He was sitting by the window, his face was flushed, and there was a light in his eyes as the door opened.

"You wished to speak to me, sir." Mr. Frampton had said the gentleman was a foreigner, he believed it was M. Corsand. With that name the past had returned to Mr. Ashley's recollection. It brought back the shock of the last week, and all the old memories of suspicion and dislike. He had been frightfully agitated, but he insisted upon seeing him immediately. He would hear of no delay.

"You wished to speak to me," he repeated; for M. Corsand had hesitated: he was shocked at the appearance of the man before him. "Who am I addressing? tell me."

"I will! I am—I was—the husband of Ellinor Vibert!"

"Husband?"

"Yes, the husband of the woman who, next to your wife, was most honoured and respected by you. My name is Corsand."

"Ellinor!" ejaculated Mr. Ashley, with a reverence which touched M. Corsand's very

soul. His dead saint had a tabernacle even here also.

"You understand from that one fact how groundless were all your suspicions, how unjust your accusations against your daughter."

"Ellinor," repeated Mr. Ashley.

"It was Ellinor's secret! I yielded unwisely, now, I think, to her wish, that our marriage should never be divulged. When your letter arrived, it cut her to the heart, and in her first indignation she would have sent Cordelia back to you, and would have severed herself completely from your family and from you. She had a great regard for you, Mr. Ashley, and suffered accordingly."

Mr. Ashley covered his face with his hands.

"Ellinor had always wished to heap her great wealth on me alone, leaving it to me to befriend those she loved; but, for obvious reasons, I was firm in refusing my consent to this. We never differed but upon that point." M. Corsand's voice broke a little. "But I only partly conquered. She would not give it to any one else as I rejected it, and left the whole amount to charities, to be presided over and managed by me. On her death-bed she besought me never to forget Cordelia, but to act towards her as a parent, and as she would have done herself had she lived. I have sought to do so; but a mistaken delicacy in

keeping up the mystery of our marriage after her death as during her life has led to misapprehensions which I deplore bitterly, both for my sake and Ellinor's."

Every syllable he said carried conviction with it, and then the sacred name he invoked was a shield over him.

"Frenchman!" thought Mr. Ashley—"he does not speak or look like a d——d Frenchman, or how could she have married him." Ellinor was absolved.

"For the last six months, or more, I have been absent from Europe. I have never seen Cordelia since she left Naples with her husband."

"Six months absent from Europe!"

"Yes. But I have some relations, lately married, who met her at Milan, and who were able to be of some use to her, for while there she was very ill. They left her to travel to England *vid* Paris, and they went on to Lucerne."

"Good God!" said Mr. Ashley, who now remembered all the fabrications built on these premises. Sir Arthur's mercenary anxiety to dissolve his nephew's marriage made him too easily the dupe of information, not incorrect in every detail, but entirely false as applied to Mrs. Clayre.

"This can be proved better than by my mere word by these letters, written by my relations at Milan and from Lucerne."

"Where is she——Cordelia?"

"She has been in England since April."

There was a pause.

Mr. Frampton came forward; he had entered just before this last word.

"Mr. Ashley wishes to know where his daughter is," said M. Corsand.

"Mr. Ashley, I will tell you, but first drink this." He gave him some cordial. "You must be strong to bear a surprise. When you were in peril of life, and we none of us thought you would live, Miss Ashley sent for her sister."

"Cordelia is here!" and the old man tried to rise. "She is here—but—"

Mr. Ashley sank down again in his chair, and covered his face with his hands; the others were silent; they both felt that behind those shaking hands there were eyes filled with grateful tears and lips trembling with a father's fervent prayer.

"I must go to her," he said, and attempted to rise; "my poor child"—

"One moment, Mr. Ashley. She has been very ill. She was unprepared to see you. She has received a terrible shock, and has been at death's door herself."

A fearful yet vague remembrance arose in the father's heart. He indistinctly recalled a letter, in which he had cursed her, and which was full of the most bitter denunciations. Had she received

it—had it ever been sent? Oh, how bitterly he blamed himself!

"But I may see her—and that——where is he—that husband of hers?"

"Mr. Clayre," said M. Corsand, gravely, "was unfortunately led to suspect from your letter, which he—"

"Found among Ellinor's papers. By heaven, I have been a fool, and worse than a fool! I see it all."

"Cordelia has been cruelly used by those who loved her best,—her husband has been alienated from her, and more or less Ellinor, you, I, all to whom she was most dear, have been the cause of her sorrow. For me, I repent with all my heart that I ever consented to a secret which has cost so much. Had you known of our marriage you would not have written that letter; had that letter not been written, Mr. Clayre and Cordelia would have understood each other."

"And I, her father, in my passion and folly, cursed her—"

"Mr. Clayre is here," continued M. Corsand, with a voice almost choked by emotion. "We must hope that he has become acquainted with his error."

"Let me go to her," repeated Mr. Ashley.

"You must not allow yourself to be overcome, she is very weak; you are only just out of

danger — I could not answer for the consequences," interrupted Mr. Frampton.

"My wife," said Mrs. Ashley; "send Mrs. Ashley to me." In such a moment the stalwart man felt that to only one soft heart could he unburden his joy, that this heavy load of care and fear was cast away, and that only one dear and gentle hand would uphold him in his happiness, as it had upheld him in his grief—the hand which had never withdrawn itself from him, or been cold towards him from the moment he had first clasped it in his.

They left him and sent in Mrs. Ashley. M. Corsand paused for a moment on the threshold—"Ellinor," he murmured, "I bear this desecration of my soul for the sake of the child thou didst love. I have broken my vow to thee; but it is to save Cordelia."

Mr. Frampton lightly knocked at Cordelia's door. Gerard opened it.

He flushed to the roots of his hair when he saw M. Corsand.

"There is a lady down-stairs who wishes to see you," said Mr. Frampton.

"Princess Bifrons," said M. Corsand, looking keenly at him.

"Impossible!" he said, and retreated into the room. His face flushed with a storm of indignation at that name. "Ivy," he said, in a hoarse voice,

"tell her—the lady down-stairs—I cannot see her."

Ivy slipped out, and Mr. Frampton and M. Corsand returned to Mr. Ashley's room to help him across the passage.

She found the Princess writing a letter. She turned round, as the door opened.

"My brother is engaged, Madam, and cannot come down-stairs."

"I must see him, it is of the greatest importance, to him, not to me," she added with emphasis.

"I will tell him."

The Princess looked inquisitively at her and muttered as she left the room, "I should never have deceived *her;* what strength, what composure, what invincible calmness in that girlish face! It was a young girl like that who gave the poet his ideal of Una. But I must call her." She called Ivy, gently.

"Did you call me?"

"Yes; will you return for one moment?"

Ivy obeyed, and paused on the threshold of the room.

"This letter is for Mrs. Clayre; it explains—"

Ivy put it aside.

"Excuse me, Madam, no explanations are needed."

"Mrs. Clayre believed her husband was attached to another person."

"She does not think so now."

"A letter—"

"I cannot wait," said Ivy, coldly; "believe me, there is no necessity for any confession as to wrong done or intended—all that is past, with us, and, I hope, with those who *did* the wrong. I must return up-stairs."

She bowed gravely, and was gone.

"I had better follow her if I would see Clayre; he, no doubt, seeks to escape me, but he *shall* know that he owes his happiness to *me*;" and she followed up-stairs with a light and stealthy step.

As she entered the passage leading to Cordelia's room, she saw Mr. Frampton follow Sarah into it. When she entered, she saw Mr. Ashley seated on the chair beside the bed. Mrs. Ashley was standing behind her husband with her arm around him, Gerard was kneeling by Cordelia's pillow, the others were behind Mrs. Ashley.

Cordelia's eyes were closed, but more from exhaustion than sleep.

All were silent, and then the closed eyes slowly opened on her father's face.

He was bending forward with an eager, fluttering smile.

"My dear child, live that I may bless you."

"Cordelia," said her mother, in a low voice, "all those who love you are with you. We are all here."

Her eyes turned, as she heard these words, from her father to her mother, and then rested on Gerard's bowed head. Life and light seemed to return to her features as she saw them all.

She laid her hand in her husband's, and tried to raise herself, as if to see them more distinctly. As she did so, she caught sight of a pale face behind all the rest. They did not see it, for they were looking at her, and it vanished almost as soon as it appeared.

"Liesa!" murmured Cordelia; "then I am in Heaven, at last," and she sank back clasping her thin hands over her eyes, from which the tears were slowly dropping.

"She has borne it better than I expected," said Mr. Frampton, "but she had better be left quiet now. Let me help you back, sir," he said to Mr. Ashley.

They obeyed him, but Mr. Ashley stooped down and kissed his daughter's forehead, with a blessing which she heard, and which with its fervour restored warmth and power to the poor life which had so long been tried and tortured.

He shook hands with Gerard. "If I was the cause of your doubting her, hear me confess I was to blame."

"We have all a good deal to make up to her for," he continued—"but I knew not that Ellinor

was married at the very time to the man I suspected loved her."

Gerard Clayre started up with a violent exclamation, and went up to M. Corsand. "I did not wait to hear this to know I was wrong; I have been grievously wrong throughout; you have been right always, and one day I hope to thank you better than I can now."

M. Corsand smiled and pressed his hand. It was a beautiful but melancholy smile. "Forget any part I may have had in what you have suffered. The concealment of my marriage was a fatal error. I was too rigidly faithful to my vow of secrecy."

"No; my pride and cruelty were the cause of all."

"That lady, who has so long been her enemy and yours, can give you more proofs—"

"Never! I require nothing more; all is not yet clear, but I can trust. No proofs could make me honour Cordelia more, or despise that woman less."

He returned to the sick room.

The others, M. Corsand, Ivy and Sarah, went down-stairs. On the table was the Princess's muff with some papers in it, addressed to Madame Clayre; nothing else was visible.

M. Corsand guessed that having found herself forestalled, and her desire to be the dispenser of Gerard's happiness baulked, she had retired,

mortified and disgusted. The tardy reparation she came to offer was futile—the husband and wife, the father and daughter were united without her aid or her explanations. She had failed; failed in her evil intentions; failed in her good purposes. The stroke hit hard.

The pallid face among the pillows had reminded her of the one she had looked at but a few days previously, and the promise which had then been extorted from her. She was foiled in accomplishing it, and this failure added a superstitious feeling to the acute pain and humiliation roused by a sense of her own impotency. There was a Witness against her in the world of spirits who would now be ever unappeased and unappeasable. Cordelia's exclamation had put her to flight. She had sped out of the house without turning back. Her part to make or mar was over.

CHAPTER X.

ABOUT six weeks after the visit of the Princess to the Ferry, a letter was received by Gerard from Sir Arthur. It ran thus:—

"DEAR G.—I am writing in haste, as I am under orders by my physicians to leave England almost immediately. The Court will be shut up, and Lady Clayre and Ellen will follow. Princess Bifrons is in Paris, making preparations for her journey to the East. She has been long anxious to ameliorate the condition of women in Syria, and purposes devoting some of her vast wealth to the foundation of a convent in Jerusalem, and is forming a company of masters and matrons and artists and men of science to join the good work. If I find Nice does not suit me, I may push on and meet her. She told me that your reconciliation with Mrs. Clayre is a *fait accompli*, and that she was mainly instrumental in bringing about this result. All's well that ends well, and I have nothing to say to it. A divorce is a most expensive affair always, and for once you have acted with

prudence. Norton's legacy to you will enable you to purchase your majority, and in India you will no doubt, be able to live on your pay. Ivy proposes to remain where she is, and we have consented, at her request, to leave Annie with her, at all events until we are settled. She may join us at Nice if she likes, and bring Annie with her, but I am not anxious about it. Girls of her age are ruined by continental travelling—unfitted to become English wives and mothers. After all, there is no compensation, if they lose those qualities which men value most in women—submission, modesty, and unselfishness. Genius is the gift I could most willingly dispense with, both in men and women. Genius gives licence for irregularity, and claims forbearance for sin. I hope I shall hear of Ivy's being married long before the age in which she will be her own mistress. Few girls have more dangerous tendencies in spite of her gentle good-humoured manner. A woman like the Princess is one in a thousand. Her great gifts have not tempted her to throw off the proprieties of her sex. Her politics are unimpeachable; her religious faith, exemplary. It is marvellous to me how she organises, institutes, and completes so much, and yet remains all the time the elegant woman we see her. If, on arriving at Nice, I find I can get an apartment on reasonable terms, I shall settle Lady Clayre

in it, and be off myself to the East. I have a great anxiety to see Jerusalem.

"There is one matter of business which I must ask you to co-operate with me in. The mortgage on the Fenton farms will be foreclosed, and I must raise the money on the Larchwood estate. You must come to town, as your signature is necessary. Never was man so hampered as I have been through life.

"Yours,

"ARTHUR CLAYRE."

Gerard put down the letter, and could not help a smile, though it was followed by a dark and more thoughtful expression. What an escape he had had from being entangled in Sir Arthur's pitiful and sordid schemes. He looked at Cordelia, who was sitting beside him, as a man looks at some treasure he has snatched from a wreck. The ache for what might have been lost is blended with the joy for what has been won.

"What is the matter, Gerard?"

"Nothing—Sir Arthur's letters always annoy me. However, he gives his imperial sanction to our plans. *We may* go to India—Ivy and Annie *may* remain here."

"I am very glad; he might have prevented Ivy staying here."

"Are you sure, Cordelia, you are contented to go to India?"

"To go with you, my dearest?" Cordelia's smile was so sweet that her husband was obliged to stoop down and kiss her.

"I have thought a good deal, Cordelia, about it. It seems selfish to drag you out there, when I think of all your gifts and powers—it is *such* a sacrifice."

She put her hand, still very thin and delicate-looking, before his mouth.

"My dear Gerard, you must not speak so—where you go, I go. 'My gifts' may still be of use to us"—she smiled. "I too have thought a good deal, and I know now that the duty we must all cling to is the duty nearest to us—mine is to be with you. As a wife, that is my first and strongest duty. If you go to India, I go with you."

He pressed her hand.

"I think when Foster sees you, you will change some of his ideas."

"Who is Foster?"

"The best fellow in the world, but *such* principles."

"My dear Gerard!"

"I should say in theory, for his actions are honest and kind enough. But for him I should have died in India. By insisting on my return just at that time, he saved my life and my happiness. He was very good to me in a time of great misery." . . . . . He paused.

"I cannot think of it!"—he shuddered,—"and yet I should like to make a clean breast of it at once, and have done with it. From the moment I saw you, there was a frankness, a transparency in your character, which enchanted me. I had never met with any one like you; a refined, lovely girl, but one who seemed as unflinchingly true as a man, was new to my experience. I cannot tell you how the Princess first insinuated to me that you were attached to Corsand, but it was very soon after I first met you. Still I could not believe it; his age, and the entire confidence and frankness of his manner towards you were so unlike a lover's. She said it, and would try to prove it, that he loved you, but wished to marry Mrs. Vibert for her money—"

Cordelia interrupted him. "It was the very fear of that false suspicion that first induced Mrs. Vibert to conceal her marriage. She was so loftily resolved that the man she loved should never be exposed to the shadow of such a reproach."

"It was perhaps not unnatural to fear it, as she was much older than he was, and yet her wealth was nothing in comparison with herself. She was so good, so gifted, so beautiful."

"She was, she was." Cordelia's eyes filled with tears.

"I confess I never was convinced; but the

Princess was always impressing me with the idea that you loved him. On the other hand, I was so encumbered with debt, and had so little prospect for the future, that even without her inuendoes I should have hesitated in declaring myself, had not Mrs. Vibert, in a conversation with me, led me to confess myself to her, and she then gave me every encouragement. By the bye, I must tell you that one of the intimations the Princess gave me, was that whenever Mrs. Vibert wished to be alone with M. Corsand, without the rivalry of your younger beauty, she would marry you to some one who would take you from Italy, but she would not do that till she was sure of Corsand. I did not think of this at the time, but it recurred to me afterwards, when she hurried on our marriage."

"I know she did," said Cordelia, deeply agitated at these recollections. "You understand, now you have read my journal, that it was on account of her health she hastened our marriage."

"Your agitation and suprise at the precipitancy of our marriage somewhat staggered me at first, but not as the remembrance of it did afterwards. You know how uncertain were your spirits the first weeks of our marriage—then came our recall to Naples. I then found that M. Corsand had never left Mrs. Vibert during her illness; then came her death, and my examination of the

papers, where I found your father's letter, and the most positive assertion of your love for M. Corsand, and of his refusal to permit the marriage, with a string of imprecations against M. Corsand, which, however unreasonable they seemed when applied to his character in the ordinary acceptation of the word, seemed justified to me, by the fact of his having loved you, yielded you up to me, and sacrificed your love for him from fear of Mr. Ashley, or from his mercenary desire of wedding fortune and position. I went instantly to the Princess with the letter; she had just returned from Russia, and had heard for the first time we were married. With the most diabolic art, she inflamed my resentment in every possible way, and alleged a thousand proofs to confirm my suspicions. I was quite stunned at first, and I could not face you for many hours. Your repeated oaths of love—first, only, undivided love—seemed to me the most barefaced perjury. You had yielded to your fate, and married me, because M. Corsand had cast you off. Much in your manner since then confirmed my suspicion; and as I passed outside the Pergola of the Villa the next day, I saw you at M. Corsand's feet, and heard you beseech him to take you with him."

"I remember."

"Still, during our journey to England, many

doubts recurred. I loved you so passionately, even when I scorned and hated your falsehood, that at any price I wished to keep you by my side, but you were gloomy, silent, wretched, and the way you received my reproaches confirmed me. You persisted, in defiance of me, to write to M. Corsand."

"But you understand now, how I had been worked upon by the Princess, and deceived about *you*. It was so galling to me to have been married from pique, inferior as I was to you in fortune and position. She forged that letter, I suppose."

"What a consummate actress; and at the same time what a cold-blooded fiend; for, working thus upon both, she disabled us. Your change of manner confirmed all the suspicions Mr. Ashley's letter gave rise to in me; and my conduct *proved* her shameful lie to you. It was a marvellously contrived baseness."

"Still, I can now see that my own imprudence, credulity, and jealous pride, made me an easy dupe."

"I suppose I must say the same; but when I think of her artifices," he clenched his hand.

"I forgive her," said Cordelia, "for after all, if she left no stone unturned to separate us, I cannot forget she was the first to make me acquainted with you. Do you remember the private theatricals at her house in Naples? How badly you acted your part."

Cordelia smiled as she spoke. Her young gaiety of heart was returning to her.

"I must acknowledge that I do not think I could make much of the vocation of actor."

"No, certainly not."

"Good heavens! what an age since then;" he remained quite still for a few seconds, and then started up.

"Cordelia, where is that letter?"

"What letter?"

"That hateful letter of the Princess's."

"I do not know; why?"

He ran into the house—they were sitting on the lawn—and returned in a few minutes with a packet in his hand. The packet the Princess had left had been put aside and never opened.

"It has all flashed upon me, my darling; that odious letter was not a forgery; at the time we acted that little play—it was a translation from the French—we did not like the love-letter in it, which was to be sent to the heroine, and we all tried to write one; mine, with some alterations, was adopted. This is the first copy I sent to her."

Cordelia held the Princess's letter in her hand, and then saw how all was thus explained there. The letter ran thus:

"If I deceived you, I also deceived myself. When I told you that, but for my absence, Mr. *Clayre* would have been mine, I firmly believed

it. I considered you my enemy, and acted accordingly. I resolved upon revenge. I determined to poison your trust in him, and ultimately to part you. When you doubted me, I was resolved you should be crushed with a proof. That letter *was* written by him, but, in a feigned character to a stage heroine. Your jealousy and anger did the rest. He will do me the justice to tell you, that when he rushed to me with Mr. Ashley's letter in his hand, I was rather the confidante of his indignation than its accomplice; though I have always believed that M. Corsand *was* your first love. It is a pleasant thought to me that this explanation may be the cornerstone of the happiness you will both owe to me."

Gerard looked over her shoulder as she read this.

They were both silent. The faults of both had given this woman her baleful power. A fire will not produce a conflagration, unless a strong wind blows the flames onwards and around.

Each could now trace the course of events which had produced so much evil; Mrs. Vibert's concealment of her marriage; Mr. Ashley's fatal letter; the Princess's jealousy and intrigues were the moving causes, but their own pride, inflexibility, and resentment had done the rest. Cordelia confessed to herself, that after the first shock of the parting with Gerard at the Ferry, her heart had

hardened against him, and she had resolved to lead her own life, without a single thought of the man whose name she bore; how unforgiving she had felt at Florence, how sternly she had reproached him, how she had rejected Ivy's sisterly affection, and how cruelly she had cast herself alone on the world, braving isolation, hardship and toil, rather than teach herself to endure and to forgive. She saw too, how often she had been imprudent and careless of opinion; and though the calumnies against her were wicked and groundless, it was a mistake to have ever placed herself where calumnies could assail her. She saw it all clearly now, and fervently she trusted that the discipline she had undergone, had not been in vain, and that henceforth, in commencing life, as it were anew, out of the jaws of death, patience, considerateness, forgiveness prompt and active, would show the fruit of the lessons she had received.

The unhappy, thwarted life at the Ferry, the toils at Milan, the isolation of Siena, the triumphs of Florence, the hardships of London, were steps cut in that precipitous Alp, which we all must ascend—the experience of life. Below were the valleys of peace and love. If this warm sun of renewed happiness obliterated them not, the descent would be easy and successful.

Gerard on his side, knew that from the moment

he allowed his mind to be influenced by the Princess, he had erred deeply. Like most men, he had amused himself with a woman whose talents and appearance he admired, without a thought of the consequences to her. It was selfishness and frivolity on his part; a man likes to be amused by a clever woman who distinguishes him; he falls into the habit of going to her house, of occupying her time, of sharing her pursuits till the whim is over; but with her, the game is often a more serious one, and a proud and unprincipled woman takes her revenge. But the fault lies with him, who has put the weapon in her hand. His conduct to Cordelia had never been generous or trusty. He had loved her beauty, he had been resolute to obtain her entire love, and at the very first shadow on the path he had blenched. The knight who went up to the enchanted castle in the old chivalric tale, heeded not the voices which deterred him, but pushed on and won. Less inflexibility, less self-sustained obstinacy, would have not only spared him months of suffering, but have spared Cordelia also. When he thought of all she had undergone, when he pictured *his* wife running the gauntlet of approval or disapproval before insolent managers, and she, the jewel, shrined in his heart of hearts, standing up to be condemned or accepted by a public tribunal—not one of whom was worthy to

touch her shoe—he felt beside himself with self-reproach and self-contempt.

Had he gone to her and not to the Princess, after Mr. Ashley's letter, all would have been spared. But his jealous rage had overcome him.

"My future life shall prove my repentance," he murmured.

Alas! what responsibilities we heap upon the future, poor, inconsistent mortals that we are, when we do not know whether even we have a future in prospect.

The husband and the wife turned to each other, and both could read in each other's countenances the recollections and the hopes which had occupied them.

They could both trace the working of the causes which had separated them, and now that their perceptions were made keener by humility and candour, they could also see how they had been led from an abyss of grief and evil to the pleasant land on which they now stood. Sarah, Mr. Frampton, Carlo, Liesa, had all in their several ways unconsciously cleared the path of some of its briars. Ivy and M. Corsand had wrought more directly, but not more efficaciously.

The evil against them was successful only as long as their own evil had met it; but from how many unseen and unknown influences had the

good been bestowed on them? Is not this the moral of life? Violent and aggressive action, either for good or ill, on the destinies of others, matters little separately from the volition of those we act on; but the thousand subtle indirect means in our power are the only efficacious ones. Not in the tempest or the earthquake is the still small voice heard.

"It was my fault that she hated you," said Gerard.

"It was my dislike of her and distrust of myself that made me doubt you."

"It is all over now."

"Thank God!"

They were sitting under the chestnut tree on the lawn. Mr. and Mrs. Ashley were slowly walking up and down the broad gravel walk. His strong frame had not yet quite recovered from his severe illness.

Mrs. Ashley's face was radiant. All around her were happy. Her husband had been smitten to the heart by the recollection of his cruel injustice to his daughter. The sense of this had kept him from uttering any reproaches as to the brief stage career of his daughter. He had had such a part in driving her there, that, painful as it was to him to think of it, he accepted that pain as the consequence of his own headstrong and ungovernable prejudices, and never broached the subject

to his daughter. As he looked at her, with her fair, refined face and modest bearing, he was obliged to confess that the ordeal had not scathed her—that the hot ploughshares had been trodden and yet there was not a singe or scar on her woman's purity.

Mr. Frampton and Sarah were at their own home; they had been married ten days, and were to return to the Ferry to say farewell to Cordelia and her husband.

"It is getting late, Cordelia," said her mother, "we had better go in; your cough is still troublesome."

"We are coming," said Gerard, and he put his arm round her as she rose. As they stepped from the shadow of the tree to the lawn, they saw Ivy and M. Corsand descending the steps of the terrace.

"It is Corsand's last day, is it not?" said Gerard.

"Yes; how sorry Ivy will be."

"All of us, I think; but *we* go with him as far as Marseilles."

"How I wish," said Cordelia, wistfully looking at the two who were coming slowly towards them in deep conversation.

"Do not *wish* anything, dear. So much evil is done by undue wishes for, or interference with, the fates of others."